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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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WEST BENGAL TO VOTE IN FINAL PHASE OF PIVOTAL ELECTION

People travel by boat to South 24 Parganas on the eve of the second phase of the West Bengal elections on Tuesday —PTI

KOLKATA, 28 APRIL

West Bengal will vote on Wednesday in the second and final phase of assembly election, with polling across 142 constituencies in seven districts.

Voting will take place from 7am till 6pm in over 40,000 booths, with 1,448 candidates in the fray, including 220 women.

This election is a "do or die" battle for the ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC), where Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's 15-year tenure is being threatened by BJP.

For BJP, this win is crucial for expanding its national footprint and dislodging the regional party.

Campaigning has been marked by sharp exchanges on issues such as migration, development and the exclusion of voters via the Special Intensive Revision exercise; and an unusually large presence of national leaders. The high-octane rallies saw the Prime Minister, Union Home Minister, Defence Minister and many BJP Chief Ministers too.

Security arrangements have been unprecedented. There are 500 companies of central forces deployed in the state. Home Minister Amit Shah said the forces will stay 60 days after the results on 4 May, "even if BJP wins".

The Election Commission on Tuesday asked the National Investigation Agency to ensure bombs are not used by miscreants to disrupt voting and target workers of political parties.

On 26 April, police recovered crude bombs from the house of a person, allegedly a TMC worker, at Bhangar in South 24 Parganas district.

The first phase of polls on 23 April saw a record 93 per cent voter turnout.

The outcome of this election could shape the political landscape of the state for years to come. —*Agencies*

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Industrial output growth falls to 5-month low

NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL

India's industrial production growth fell to a five-month low of 4.1 per cent in March, affected by subdued manufacturing and power sector performance amid the West Asian crisis, according to official data. The Index of Industrial Production (IIP) had expanded by 3.9 per cent in March 2025. The National Statistics Office (NSO) revised February's growth to 5.1 per cent from the earlier estimate of 5.2 per cent. The previous low was 0.5 per cent in October 2025. Manufacturing grew by 4.3 per cent in March 2026, compared to 4 per cent last year. Mining output rose to 5.5 per cent from 1.2 per cent, while power generation increased marginally by 0.8 per cent versus 7.5 per cent last year. For the fiscal year 2025-26, industrial growth was almost flat at 4.1 per cent, up from 4 per cent in 2024. —*PTI*

No plan to raise fuel prices after elections: Centre

NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL

The government has confirmed that there are no plans to increase petrol and diesel prices after the West Bengal assembly elections end on 29 April. Despite global crude oil rising over 50 per cent in two months, retail fuel prices have remained unchanged for four years. Sujata Sharma, Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, stated, "There is no proposal to increase petrol and diesel prices," dismissing rumours of an imminent hike. She assured that supplies are being monitored and demand is being managed to prevent shortages, especially in Andhra Pradesh where panic buying caused some petrol pumps to run dry. Sharma emphasised, "We have enough supplies of LPG, petrol and diesel and urged the public to avoid rumours. —*PTI*

India brings 'Dawood's aide' Salim from Turkey

NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL

In a major breakthrough, the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) on Tuesday secured the return of international drug trafficker Mohammad Salim Dola from Turkey, Union Home Minister Amit Shah announced, vowing ruthless action against drug cartels. Dola, 59, described as a close aide of fugitive Dawood Ibrahim, was arrested based on an Interpol Red Notice issued on India's request in March 2024. Officials said he had been absconding in multiple narcotics cases and allegedly ran a transnational drug syndicate across the West Asia, Africa and Europe. According to the Ministry of Home Affairs, Dola was brought back under "Operation Global-Hunt" and detained at IGI Airport, New Delhi, where the NCB briefly questioned him. He will be produced before a Delhi court and later sent to Mumbai on transit remand. —*PTI*

Airlines warn of halt, seek ATF price relief

AI, IndiGo & SpiceJet write to govt amid war

MUMBAI, 28 APRIL

Air India, IndiGo and SpiceJet have told the government that the country's airline industry is under extreme stress and on the verge of "stopping operations", as they sought revision in Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF) pricing and urgent financial support.

The Federation of Indian Airlines (FIA), representing the three carriers, said in a letter dated April 26 to the civil aviation ministry that West Asia turmoil, rising crude oil prices and airspace restrictions have sharply increased operating costs, particularly on long-haul routes. ATF accounts for nearly 40 per cent of airline operating expenses.

The airlines warned that the sector is facing "unsurmountable losses" due to an abnormal rise in jet fuel prices and widening crack spread between crude and ATF. They cautioned that any ad hoc pricing difference between domestic and international operations, or further irrational increases, could lead to grounding of aircraft and mass cancellations.

The FIA urged for uniform fuel pricing across domestic and international sectors, as was earlier done under the crack band mechanism.

The airlines also sought temporary deferment of the 11 per cent excise duty on ATF, arguing that rupee depreciation and higher fuel costs have significantly inflated tax impact and overall operational burden.

They pointed out that last month the government capped ATF price hikes for domestic operations at Rs 15 per litre, but international prices rose by Rs 73 per litre, making overseas operations "completely unviable". The FIA said this imbalance has rendered airline networks unsustainable and led to heavy losses in April. The federation also highlighted high VAT rates on ATF, noting Delhi imposes 25 per cent, Tamil Nadu 29 per cent, while Mumbai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad and Kolkata range between 16–20 per cent. These cities account for over half of India's air traffic, it said. —*PTI*

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UAE SAYS IT WILL LEAVE OPEC ON 1 MAY

The United Arab Emirates said Tuesday it will leave OPEC effective 1 May, stripping the oil cartel of one of its major producers and further weakening its influence over global oil supplies and prices.

OPEC, founded in 1960, coordinates petroleum policies among member nations, manages production quotas and seeks to stabilise oil markets. It accounts for about 38 per cent of global output and holds nearly 79.5 per cent of proven reserves.

The UAE had long resisted OPEC output limits, arguing it could produce more. Analysts said it had been expanding capacity and was "itching to pump more oil". It also exits OPEC+, the wider grouping led by Russia.

The UAE, producing around 3.4 million barrels per day, has capacity for about 5 million. It says it will still expand output while pursuing clean energy goals.

Tensions with Saudi Arabia and shifting regional politics, alongside earlier withdrawals like Qatar's in 2019, were cited as contributing factors.

The move is not expected to immediately impact markets due to supply constraints linked to conflict in Iran and disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz. —*PTI*

WHEN HEAT KILLS

Reschedule work hours: Govt issues heat advisory

NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL

The Ministry of Labour and Employment has advised employers to change working hours, keep workplaces cool, and provide ice packs and other items to prevent heat-related illnesses.

The advisory, sent to Chief Secretaries and Administrators of all States and Union Territories, calls for immediate preventive and mitigation measures to protect workers from extreme heat.

Measures include rescheduling working hours, ensuring safe drinking water, providing shaded rest areas and improving cooling arrangements at workplaces.

Employers have also been directed to keep emergency ice packs and heat illness prevention kits readily available.

Factory, mine and construction site operators are advised to slow work during peak heat (12pm-4pm), use two-person crews where necessary, and ensure ventilation and cooling systems. Coordination with health departments has been recommended for regular health check-ups of workers. Special focus has been placed on construction workers, brick kiln workers, daily wage earners and other casual labourers, who are most vulnerable. ESIC facilities will set up heat stroke desks with ORS kits. —*PTI*

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RAICHUR WORKER DIES OF 'HEATSTROKE'

RAICHUR, 28 APRIL

A 50-year-old labourer working under MGNREGA died after collapsing in extreme heat in Raichur taluk on Monday.

The deceased, Huseenappa of Yapaladinni village, had been engaged in lake development work at Rallakunta for the past four days. Raichur Panchayat Executive Officer Chandrashekhar told **Salar News** that he collapsed around noon while returning home after work. He said the exact cause of death will be confirmed after the post-mortem,. Family members alleged heat exhaustion, while officials suspect low blood pressure.

Temperatures in Raichur have touched 41°C, making outdoor work hazardous. When contacted by Salar News, the Raichur Deputy Commissioner did not respond. —*Salar News*

4 PRO-KHALISTANIS HELD AFTER BLAST AT PATIALA RAIL TRACK

CHANDIGARH, 28 APRIL

A pro-Khalistan terror module triggered a blast on a freight rail corridor near Shambhu in Patiala, killing one member during an attempted detonation and damaging the track, police said on Tuesday.

The explosion near Bothonia village, initially termed low-intensity, was later confirmed as sabotage. Four accused, including kingpin Pardeep Singh Khalsa, have been arrested. Police recovered arms, explosives and devices.

A SIM card and CCTV leads are being probed. An NIA investigation is likely. Rail traffic has resumed after repairs. —*PTI*

MOCK DRILL IN B'LURU

Civil Defence and Home Guards conducted a mock drill at Bengaluru's Ulsoor headquarters on Tuesday amid war in West Asia. The exercise included an air raid warning and blackout simulation. Residents were advised to switch off lights, gas and electrical appliances, avoid windows and lifts, and take cover indoors —*MOHAMMED ASAD*

50 BJP workers detained for barging into Umar event

BENGALURU, 28 APRIL

Tension prevailed outside the Bangalore International Centre (BIC) in Domlur on Tuesday ahead of a programme linked to Umar Khalid, with BJP Yuva Morcha members attempting to barge into the premises.

Police took more than 50 protesters into preventive custody (in pic) after they tried to breach barricades and enter the heavily secured venue. Security had been tightened at the spot in anticipation of protests.

BJP workers, led by former Bengaluru Mayor M Gautham Kumar, staged demonstrations demanding cancellation of the event. The programme included a reading of excerpts from the book 'Umar Khalid and His World', followed by a discussion involving historians and intellectuals.

Protesters raised slogans and attempted to force entry into the venue, prompting police action.

Ahead of the event, the BJP had petitioned Bengaluru Police Commissioner Seemant Kumar Singh seeking cancellation of the programme. A delegation led by Bengaluru Central MP PC Mohan submitted a memorandum in this regard. Umar Khalid is currently in jail in connection with allegations linked to the 2020 Delhi riots conspiracy case. —*PTI*

SC upholds mandatory admission of students under RTE

NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL

The Supreme Court on Tuesday reaffirmed that admission into pre-primary classes under the Right to Education (RTE) Act must be regarded as a "national mission". A bench of Justices PS Narasimha and Alok Aradhe stated that neighbourhood schools are constitutionally and statutorily obliged to admit students allocated by the state government without delay.

The court emphasised that denying such admissions undermines the fundamental right to education guaranteed under Article 21A of the Constitution. The verdict highlighted that the obligation of neighbourhood schools to admit children from weaker sections, constituting 25 per cent of class strength under Section 12 of the RTE Act, can transform society.

Justice Narasimha said that effective implementation of these provisions is essential for realising the constitutional right and securing the objective of equality of status. The court dismissed an appeal by Lucknow Public School, which challenged a high court order directing it to admit a student from a weaker section allocated under UP rules.

The bench reiterated that once a list is prepared and forwarded by the state, schools have no authority to refuse admission, emphasising that the right to education must be realised in letter and spirit. —*PTI*

INCOME DOUBLES

KSDL records Rs 2,016 crore turnover for the 1st time

BENGALURU, 28 APRIL

Karnataka Minister MB Patil on Tuesday said that Karnataka Soaps and Detergents Limited (KSDL), a state-owned enterprise, has achieved a record turnover of Rs 2,016 crore in 2025–26 along with a profit of Rs 507 crore, calling it a "historic milestone" among public sector undertakings.

Addressing a felicitation event titled "Mysuru Sandal's Pinnacle of Achievement" in Bengaluru, the Large and Medium Industries Minister said KSDL doubled its turnover from Rs 1,000 crore to Rs 2,000 crore in just four years. It rose from Rs 1,375 crore in 2022–23 to Rs 2,016 crore, an increase of Rs 641 crore since the present government took office.

The company expanded its product range from 34 to 94 items by introducing 57 new products without additional recruitment or new machinery. Despite a production capacity of 26,000 metric tonnes, output reached 47,494 metric tonnes in 2025–26. Of the Rs 507 crore profit, Rs 157 crore will be paid as dividend to the government and Rs 5 crore contributed to the Chief Minister's Relief Fund. The firm also earned Rs 420 crore from modern trade and Rs 120 crore from e-commerce. Patil said KSDL aims for Rs 3,000 crore turnover by 2028. —*PTI*

Passenger held at KIA with Rs 1.28 cr hydro-ganja

BENGALURU, 28 APRIL

A passenger who arrived from Bangkok was apprehended at Kempegowda International Airport on Tuesday with hydroponic anja valued at Rs 1.28 crore, officials said. The accused, whose identity was not disclosed, was arrested under the NDPS (Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances) Act, 1985, they added. "We intercepted a passenger arriving from Bangkok and seized 3.66kg of hydroponic anja, valued at Rs 1.28 crore, concealed in checked-in baggage," Bengaluru Customs said in a post on X. Further investigation is underway. —*PTI*

15 hurt after KSRTC bus overturns in Chitradurga

CHITRADURGA, 28 APRIL

Fifteen passengers sustained minor injuries after the KSRTC bus they were travelling in overturned near Heggare in Challakere taluk of Chitradurga district at around 7am after the driver allegedly lost control of the vehicle in this district on Tuesday morning, police said. According to police, the bus was en route from Raichur to Bengaluru when the driver allegedly lost control of the vehicle, hit a divider and the bus overturned. Fifteen passengers sustained minor injuries and were shifted to the Challakere Government Hospital, they said. The accident is suspected to have occurred due to the driver losing control after falling asleep, police said. Further investigation is underway, they added.—*PTI*

Congress functionary arrested on POCSO charges

BENGALURU, 28 APRIL

A Congress functionary Anand P has been arrested on POCSO charges for alleged inappropriate behaviour with a 16-year-old minor girl in the City.

The 40-year-old complainant has also been accused of assault, criminal intimidation and coercion, police said.

According to the FIR, Anand allegedly used to visit his house and developed an illicit relationship with his wife.

When he questioned their relationship, his wife and Anand allegedly assaulted him and attempted to kill him. The complaint also alleges repeated acts of violence against the children, police said.

The accused and the complainant's wife allegedly assaulted the children multiple times with sticks and stabbed them with a knife, causing bleeding injuries, according to the FIR.

The complainant claimed to possess photographic evidence of the incidents. Police said a case has been registered based on the complaint, and further investigation is underway. —*PTI*

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Govt rolls out plan to tackle global warming

Forest Minister says CM will lay foundation for City's third largest park next month

Forest Minister Eshwara Khandre with Media Academy Chairperson Ayesha Khanum, during a talk on extreme heat and its Impact on Bengaluru, in the City, on Tuesday —*MOHAMMED ASAD*

BENGALURU, 28 APRIL

Forest, Ecology and Environment Eshwar Khandre on Tuesday said that a Karnataka State Action Plan on Climate Change has been formulated to mitigate the impact of global warming and climate change, and directions have been issued to ensure its proper implementation.

Speaking after presiding over a seminar on extreme heat and its impact on Bengaluru, organised by the Karnataka Media Academy, he said the Environmental Management and Policy Research Institute (EMPRI) has taken steps to implement the action plan and training programmes will be organised for district officials and other departments in all 31 districts.

According to the Karnataka State Action Plan on Climate Change Draft Report, 2023, warming is projected in the range of 0.5 degree Celsius to 2.5 degree Celsius in the short term – 2030s – and 1 degree Celsius to 2.5 degree Celsius in the long term – 2080s for all districts. The Western Ghats region is forecast to have the lowest rise, while Northern Karnataka and some eastern districts, like Tumakuru, will have a higher rise in temperatures.

Noting that a slight increase in temperatures could significantly impact life, it stated "the focus is on summer maximum temperature (potentially causing heat stress) and winter minimum temperature (critical for human comfort and winter crops)".

The State government should allocate Rs 10 crore to each assembly constituency to resolve the drinking water problem.

-R Ashoka, BJP Leader

Simultaneously, the number of annual rain days is likely to increase in majority of the districts, with drought years set to decrease in all districts apart from Udupi in the short term and marginally reduce for 27 districts in the long term, compared to previous data.

Khandre emphasised that due to global warming and climate change, even seasons are changing today.

On the 444 acres in the Jarakabande area allotted to the Indian Air Force, allegedly without due process, he said "Steps are now being taken to reclaim this forest land."

He added that the government has resolved to construct a major biological park on 153 acres at Madappanahalli in Bengaluru North taluk, and Cabinet approval has been obtained. "The CM will lay the foundation stone next month. This will be the largest park after Lalbagh and Cubbon Park. It would not be incorrect to call this an achievement of the century."

—*Salar News with agencies*

Mysuru sizzles at 40 degrees Celsius

Temperatures hit 40 degrees Celsius in some taluks of Mysuru district on Monday and Tuesday, with the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) forecasting a maximum temperature of 37 degree Celsius over the next few days.

Red alert in North Karnataka

The Karnataka State Natural Disaster Monitoring Centre issued a Red Alert for North Karnataka districts such as Bidar, Kalaburagi, Vijayapura and Yadgir, with temperatures touching 42ºC. Ballari, Chikkaballapur, Koppal, and Tumakuru saw temperatures hit 40ºC.

CM to step down if RaGa asks: Rajanna

BENGALURU, 28 APRIL

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah is ready to "sacrifice power" if party leader Rahul Gandhi so demands, said MLA KN Rajanna on Tuesday.

Rajanna, who is seen as close to Siddaramaiah, also appeared to support the idea of a change in the party leadership as well, an apparent reference to Deputy CM and Karnataka Congress President DK Shivakumar.

"Power is not permanent for any politician, those who lose it will try to gain it and those who have gained it will try to maintain it," Rajanna told press. "The CM's mindset is that he is ready to sacrifice power or continue in power as per Rahul Gandhi's directions. He will abide by Rahul Gandhi's decision."

When asked whether the party president should also be changed, the former minister said that everything has to change.

Rahul Gandhi, Siddaramaiah, KN Rajanna —*PTI*

Siddaramaiah is a Sardar for fifteen days, he is Pandrah din-ka-Sultan (Sultan for 15 days). After that Siddaramaiah will not be the Chief Minister

-Govind Karjol, former DyCM

"If the Ministers have to change, why shouldn't the party president. Everything will be decided by High Command," he said, urging the party leadership to quickly resolve the matter.

The development comes amid speculations that there could be leadership change and Cabinet reshuffle after 4 May, when the results of the Davangere (South) and Bagalkot bypolls are announced.

- The comments come amid speculations about a power tussle between Siddaramaiah and DKS. Rajanna, a close aide of Siddaramaiah, was removed from the Cabinet after comments against Rahul's vote chori claims and about a "September revolution" in State politics.

Several senior ministers and MLAs have recently travelled to Delhi to meet the High Command.

Meanwhile, Home Minister G Parameshwara, said the High Command will resolve the matters soon. —*PTI*

Govt bars obscene songs at school events

BENGALURU, 28 APRIL

The Karnataka School Education Department has issued a circular strictly prohibiting children from being made to dance to obscene songs in educational and cultural programmes.

It stated that such dances would negatively impact students' mental health and moral values and will create indiscipline and harm the sanctity of education. All Deputy Directors (Administration) of the State's School Education Department have been directed to precent students from dancing in all government, aided and unaided schools, it said.

"If it is found that children are being made to dance to obscene songs, appropriate action will be taken against the headmaster or management of such school," it added.

The department also listed certain measures in this regard, which also includes; selecting songs that are inspiring, positive, instilling national pride in children and reflecting the greatness, dignity, values, culture, and morality of the state.

It said the school headmaster and management are responsible for selecting songs and dances for cultural programmes and should therefore ensure that students wear decent clothes in dance or cultural programmes. —*PTI*

ALWAYS BE PREPARED

Personnel conducted a special mock drill amid the ongoing West Asia war, at Home Guard and Civil Defence Centre office premises, in Ulsoor, Bengaluru, on Tuesday -*MOHAMMED ASAD*

SIX FOREIGN WOMEN HELD FOR PROSTITUTION

BENGALURU, 28 APRIL

Six foreign women were arrested after they were found allegedly soliciting men in a public place for prostitution, police said on Tuesday.

The arrests were made by the Women Protection Wing of the Central Crime Branch (CCB) on 24 April. Police, however, have not disclosed the nationalities of the women.

Police said the operation was carried out following a tip off that some foreign women were standing near the footpath of the bus stop near Madiwala Check Post and were soliciting men passing by on the road for prostitution.

During the operation, it was found that six foreign women were soliciting men in a public place for prostitution, a statement by the office of the police commissioner stated.

The police secured all the six women. When asked about their passports and visas, they failed to provide satisfactory information, it said.

They were taken to Koramangala Police Station where a case has been registered. — *PTI*

Nirmala opens Gems and Jewellery institute in Udupi

UDUPI, 28 APRIL

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman inaugurated the Indian Institute of Gems and Jewellery's (IIGJ) campus in Udupi on Tuesday, praising its role in providing professional training and fostering entrepreneurship. She said the centre, established in 2016 with support from the Gems and Jewellery Export Promotion Council and local authorities, has grown despite Covid-19 disruptions.

Sitharaman noted, "We started in a very small place, unsure of the response. Today, advanced facilities including CAD and 3D printing are available, enabling students to gain industry-relevant skills." She highlighted the Centre's reach across Karnataka and beyond, stating, "Students have come from Karwar, Chitradurga, Raichur, and Tamil Nadu. Some had no prior experience but are now running successful jewellery businesses."

She emphasised affordability: "Training abroad is expensive, but here the (IIGJ) offers professional courses at accessible costs, making skill development widely available."

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman interacts with students at the IIGJ Udupi campus on Tuesday—*X@NSITHARAMANOFFC*

She also underlined the Centre's contribution to the jewellery export sector, stating, "This region, from Ratnagiri to Kerala, has a rich jewellery tradition serving the Indian diaspora. Skilled manpower from such centres strengthens our exports and creates livelihoods."

Sitharaman witnessed the signing of an MoU between IIGJ and IIT Madras for a programme in lab-grown diamond technologies under the InCent LGD platform.

She highlighted the Rs 242 crore grant from the 2023–24 Union Budget supporting lab-grown diamond research and viewed a 'Design to Manufacturing' demonstration. —*PTI*

MANY JUMP OUT

50 women escape as blaze engulfs City PG

BENGALURU, 28 APRIL

Around 50 women were safely evacuated after a major fire broke out at a warehouse here and spread to a four-storey PG accommodation and nearby residential buildings, police said on Tuesday.

The fire broke out at around 12.50 am (Sunday) at the warehouse in Nandini Layout, which stored banners and LED screens for distribution, they said.

No casualties were reported.

According to officials, the fire spread rapidly, engulfing the PG building and adjoining houses following which around 50 women staying in the PG were safely evacuated.

However, the CCTV footage showed some women jumped down from the window of the PG in desperation as thick smoke and fire engulfed the structure.

The blaze erupted at a nearby godown and spread to the PG *SCREENGRAB*

The fire reportedly broke out on the midnight of Sunday or early morning hours on Monday. The women inmates screamed for help after they saw the fire engulfing the PG building. Out of sheer panic and fear they then begun jumping out of the building through the window of the PG. The CCTV footage captured noise of loud scream from the residents.

Following the incident, two vehicles, including a two-wheeler parked in front of the warehouse, were completely gutted.

Fire and Emergency Services personnel rushed to the spot with two fire tenders and subsequently, the fire was brought under control, officials said.

A case of accidental fire was registered at Nandini Layout police station and a short circuit is suspected to be the reason behind it, police said, adding that further investigations are underway. —*PTI*

Woman's decomposed body found in pool of blood

BENGALURU, 28 APRIL

The body of a 34-year-old woman was found in a decomposed condition at her rented flat in Bengaluru, police said on Tuesday. The body was found naked in a pool of blood.

The deceased was identified as **Pooja Dutta**, a native of Dhanbad in Jharkhand, who was employed with a private company here.

The incident in Adugodi came to light on Monday after neighbours alerted police about a foul smell from her flat.

Police said a team broke open the door and found Dutta's body in a nude and decomposed state, lying in a pool of blood. The death may have occurred two or three days ago, they said.

No note was recovered from the spot, although torn papers were found scattered inside the house, prompting suspicion that she may have committed suicide.

The body has been sent for autopsy to ascertain the cause of death.

The landlady said Dutta had been staying in the flat since three years and was last seen on 23 April when she went out to buy groceries.

The Adugodi police have registered a case of unnatural death, and investigation is underway. — *PTI*

EC adds 1,468 WB voters, 12 lakh left out

SC tribunal clears more 'deleted' names for Phase 2 than it did for Phase 1; rejects just 6

KOLKATA, 28 APRIL

Altogether 1,468 voters whose names were restored in West Bengal's electoral rolls following tribunal orders linked to the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) exercise will be able to vote in the second and final phase of the assembly elections on 29 April, an Election Commission (EC) official said on Tuesday.

The development comes amid over 12 lakh pending appeals before Supreme Court-directed appellate tribunals, highlighting the scale of unresolved cases just a day before polling across 142 constituencies in seven districts.

According to the EC, only 1,468 appeals have been cleared so far for the second phase, while six have been rejected. The remaining applications, numbering over 12.9 lakh for this phase, are still pending, leaving the voting status of lakhs of electors uncertain.

Officials said voters included in the supplementary roll can verify their status using their EPIC number on the EC's website. "Electors whose appeals were disposed of by the appellate tribunals till 27 April have been included in a supplementary roll," an EC official told PTI.

Earlier, 139 tribunal-cleared voters were added ahead of the first phase held on April 23.

The Supreme Court had directed the EC to prepare supplementary rolls to include voters whose appeals were allowed by tribunals. However, it also clarified that pending appeals alone would not guarantee voting rights. Long queues were seen in South Kolkata's Joka area as affected voters sought clarity on their status amid delays in adjudication. The election will see over 3.2 crore voters decide the fate of 1,448 candidates across 41,001 polling stations. —*PTI*

Marginalised electors visit a help desk camp for Special Intensive Revision (SIR) at Kalighat Red Light area, in Kolkata, West Bengal —*PTI*

EC violating court order, says plea filed in Calcutta HC

A petition was filed in the Calcutta High Court on Tuesday, claiming that its earlier order on action against "troublemakers" in view of the West Bengal assembly polls was not being adhered to by the Election Commission.

The HC had on 22 April

stayed an order of the commission's police observer, who termed certain citizens as "troublemakers" and directed the authorities to take action against them. In a plea before a division bench presided by Chief Justice Sujoy Paul, TMC MP Kalyan Banerjee claimed that the commission prepared a fresh list of around 350 people for taking action against them. —*PTI*

MOVEMENT RESTRICTED AT B'DESH BORDER

KOLKATA, 28 APRIL

The movement of people and vehicles on the Bangladesh border routes in West Bengal's North 24 Parganas district has been restricted ahead of the second and final phase of the assembly elections on Wednesday, officials said.

The curbs, which were imposed on 26 April will continue till the completion of the polling process, and is applicable to the Petrapole land port, the largest such facility in South Asia, they said.

The order, however, allowed exemptions in case of medical emergencies, voters returning to exercise their franchise, and transport of perishable goods.

Thirty-three Assembly constituencies in the district will go to the polls today. The restriction is aimed at preventing cross-border movement that could influence the electoral process, particularly in border districts like North 24 Parganas, which share a porous boundary with Bangladesh. West Bengal shares a 2,200-km-long border with Bangladesh.

AFTER LATE-NIGHT VISIT

If he's Singham, I'm Pushpa: TMC leader taunts cop

KOLKATA, 28 APRIL

TMC candidate Jahangir Khan on Tuesday hit out at Election Commission-appointed IPS officer Ajay Pal Sharma, following a late-night visit to his residence in South 24 Parganas' Falta, saying, "This is Bengal; if he is 'Singham', I am 'Pushpa'."

The 2011-batch Uttar Pradesh cadre officer, deployed as one of 95 Election Commission observers for the second phase of polling in West Bengal, faced protests from TMC supporters who raised "Jai Bangla" slogans outside Khan's residence and election office. The officer, known as "Singham" in Uttar Pradesh, reportedly warned that strict action would be taken if voter intimidation was found.

An Election Commission official said Sharma visited the area after reports that Khan's associates were allegedly collecting voter identity cards and threatening electors.

Eyewitnesses said the officer visited Khan's house late Monday night and cautioned that authorities would act firmly against any malpractice. Falta falls under the Diamond Harbour constituency represented by Abhishek Banerjee.

Reacting strongly, TMC leaders accused Sharma of overstepping his mandate. West Bengal minister Chandrima Bhattacharya said, "Can he visit a house at night and issue threats? He seems to have been brought here to disturb peace."

Minister Aroop Biswas added that observers must remain neutral and any overreach would be challenged legally.

Meanwhile, TMC MP Mahua Moitra shared a video of the officer on social media, mocking him over his "policing skills" and questioning his conduct.

The Election Commission has not yet issued an official response to the allegations. —*PTI*

Publisher of book on Shivaji detained in Maharashtra

BULDHANA, 28 APRIL

Publisher Prashant Ambi and his supporters were detained by police in Maharashtra's Buldhana district on Tuesday ahead of a protest to condemn objectionable remarks made by Shiv Sena MLA Sanjay Gaikwad against him over a book on Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj.Gaikwad kicked up a row last week after an audio clip of him using offensive language and threatening Kolhapur-based Ambi went viral on social media. The MLA referred to the book titled 'Shivaji Kon Hota' (Who was Shivaji?), written by CPI leader Govind Pansare and originally published in 1988.

The Sena MLA had later expressed regret about his abusive remarks against a publisher, but maintained that the Maratha emperor should be addressed respectfully in the publication. —*PTI*

—*PTI*

TVK Chief Vijay visits Tiruchendur temple

TUTICORIN, 28 APRIL

Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (Vijay) chief Vijay visited the famed Subramanya Swamy temple in Tiruchendur, Thoothukudi district, on Tuesday, days after the Tamil Nadu Assembly elections.

A party source said Vijay prayed for the victory of TVK in its maiden electoral contest, with counting of votes scheduled for 4 May.

The actor-politician is hopeful of a strong performance in the party's first election outing.The Tiruchendur Murugan temple, one of the six sacred Arupadai Veedu shrines of Lord Subrahmanya, is the second such abode in Tamil Nadu. Vijay was accorded Poorna Kumbha honours on arrival, presented with a Vel and shawl, and took part in the Viswaroopa darshan. He was accompanied by TVK general secretary 'Bussy' Anand and other leaders. —*PTI*

PDP protests removal of Urdu from J&K records

SRINAGAR, 28 APRIL

Opposition PDP staged a protest against the Jammu and Kashmir government's decision to remove Urdu as a mandatory language in revenue records. Led by Iltija Mufti, the protest took place at Sher-e-Kashmir Park, condemning the move which Mufti said would have "far-reaching cultural consequences." She called it "an attack on our culture and civilisation," noting that Urdu acts as a common bond among Jammu and Kashmir's languages. Mufti stated, "Removing Urdu from revenue records is not only bureaucratic but also a political move with cultural repercussions," during the demonstration, which criticised the decision made under the current government. —*PTI*

Probe urged into Kharat's link to Ajit's plane crash

PUNE, 28 APRIL

NCP (SP) MLA Rohit Pawar has alleged that Nashik godman Ashok Kharat is linked to the fatal plane crash of his uncle, former Maharashtra Deputy CM Ajit Pawar. He called for Kharat's interrogation by the CID, citing occult rituals performed near Ajit's house and a goat found hanging nearby. Pawar claimed Kharat had warned a farmer of an attack on the Pawar family and suggested Kharat's involvement in transactions on 27 and 28 January. Kharat, arrested for sexual exploitation, is suspected of storing blackmail videos. Pawar visited the CID office to submit evidence and said, "The investigation should be handled by the CID." —*PTI*

No double standards in fighting terror: Rajnath at SCO

NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) must not lose sight of 'state-sponsored' cross-border terrorism as there is no place for any 'double standards' in combating the menace, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on Tuesday in a clear reference to Pakistan's support to various terror groups.

Singh's remarks came during his address to a conference of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in Bishkek. He said India demonstrated its 'firm resolve' during Operation Sindoor that 'terror epicentres are no longer immune to justifiable punishment'.

Pitching for concerted global efforts to combat terrorism, Singh said India is also facing a growing challenge in the form of extremism, radicalism and terrorism. Terrorism has become the most serious threat to the emerging world order, he added.

"It is in this backdrop that the SCO emerged as an organisation, based on our shared values," Singh added.

Speaking on the current geopolitical upheavals, Rajnath Singh referred to increasing unilateralism and conflicts. He said a series of conflicts over the last few years led to loss of precious lives and property with a disturbing frequency. He called for effective measures to tackle the situation.

He also met with his Chinese and Russian counterparts Admiral Dong Jun and Andrei Belousov respectively on the sidelines of the SCO Defence Ministers' conclave.

Singh and Dong were learnt to have discussed the situation along LAC and stressed on maintaining peace along the border. Belousov and Singh reportedly dwelt on defence acquisition projects, including Russia's supply of S-400 air defence missiles to India. —*PTI*

INAUGURATES RS 10,000 CR PROJECTS

Govt committed to 'Act East, Act Fast' for NE: Modi in Sikkim

GANGTOK/VARANASI, 28 APRIL

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday said his government was committed not only to its 'Act East' policy but also to "Act Fast" for the eight northeastern states, which he described as India's "Ashtalakshmi", symbolising prosperity and growth.

During his two-day visit, Modi launched infrastructure projects worth over Rs 10,368 crore across Sikkim and Varanasi.

In Sikkim, projects worth about Rs 4,018 crore were inaugurated across sectors including healthcare, education, connectivity, tourism and agriculture. These included a 100-bed Ayurveda hospital, a 30-bed Integrated Sowa Rigpa Hospital, and new educational institutions.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi plays football with youngsters during his visit to Sikkim, in Gangtok, on Tuesday—*PTI*

IT-enabled infrastructure was introduced in 160 schools, alongside road and bridge upgrades. Modi also visited the Orchidarium in Gangtok and the Swarnajayanti Maitri Manjari Park, praising the state's biodiversity.

In Varanasi, he inaugurated 48 projects worth over Rs 1,050 crore and laid the foundation for 112 projects valued at around Rs 5,300 crore.

These include road and rail works, sewage treatment plants, hospital redevelopment and tourism infrastructure at ghats. —*PTI*

BJP wins all 15 municipal corporations in Gujarat

AHMEDABAD, 28 APRIL

BJP on Tuesday emerged victorious in all 15 municipal corporations.

The party made a clean sweep in Morbi and Porbandar Municipal Corporations, bagging all 52 seats in both the local bodies.

Of the 17 municipal corporations in the state, elections were held in 15.

As per the State Election Commission, the ruling party also won the municipal corporations of Ahmedabad, Surat, Vadodara, Rajkot, Jamnagar, Bhavnagar, Gandhidham, Surendranagar, Mehsana, Anand, Nadiad, Navsari and Vapi.

In Ahmedabad, the BJP bagged 160 seats out of the total 192, while Congress won 32. In the previous March 2021 elections, AIMIM) had won seven seats in the city, but this time it drew a blank.

In Surat Municipal Corporation, the BJP won 115 out of 120 seats, while Congress won only one seat. The Aam Aadmi Party, which had won 27 seats last time, managed to win only four.

BJP secured 65 out of total 72 seats in the Rajkot Municipal Corporation while Congress won 7.

In Vadodara Municipal Corporation, the BJP won 69 out of 76 seats while Congress won 6 and another candidate secured one.

BJP also won the muncipal corporations of Jamnagar and Bhavnagar with huge margins.

lost only one seat each in Surendranagar and Nadiad corporations.

All newly formed municipal corporations -- Navsari, Gandhidham, Morbi, Vapi, Anand, Nadiad, Mehsana, Porbandar and Surendranagar -- where polling was conducted for the first time witnessed BJP's victory. —*PTI*

AFTER KEJRI, SISODIA REFUSES TO APPEAR BEFORE HC JUDGE

NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL

AAP leader Manish Sisodia on Tuesday made it clear that he will not appear in proceedings in the Delhi HC before Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma in the excise policy case.

This comes a day after AAP Chief Arvind Kejriwal decided to neither appear in person nor appoint any lawyer for his case in Justice Sharma's court.

Referring to the letter written by Kejriwal raising the same concern, Sisodia said "troubling concerns" have been raised.

On Monday, Kejriwal wrote a letter to the judge after his plea seeking the recusal of Justice Sharma was rejected on 20 April.

Sisodia said he wants to record that the "troubling concerns" flagged by Kejriwal in his detailed letter to the judge are concerns that weigh upon his mind as well.

"The first is the issue arising from your Ladyship's repeated attendance at Akhil Bharatiya Adhivakta Parishad meetings, a lawyers' organisation of the RSS," the letter said. "The second is the issue arising from the professional engagement of your Ladyship's children on Central panels and the resulting appearance of closeness to the very law officers who now appear against me on the other side," he added.

Later, AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal and other AAP leaders, including Manish Sisodia, reached Rajghat to seek Mahatma Gandhi's blessings on Tuesday. — *PTI*

BINS RIJIJU'S CLAIM

Tharoor denies calling Cong 'anti-women'

NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL

Congress senior leader Shashi Tharoor on Tuesday rejected Union Minister Kiren Rijiju's claim that he had agreed the Congress is "anti-women", saying that "at no point did I say or imply" any such remarks about his party.

In a post on X, Tharoor strongly refuted Rijiju's version of events, asserting that his comments were misinterpreted. "At no point did I say or imply any such thing—and I have seven witnesses in the photograph who can confirm that," he wrote. He further added, "That was what he meant, our Minister says. No, sir, that is NOT what I meant. I did NOT agree in any way."

Tharoor reiterated that the Congress has consistently supported women's empowerment and reservation. He cited the party's role in initiating the Women's Reservation Bill, passing it in the Rajya Sabha during its tenure, and backing it in the Lok Sabha in 2023. "We are totally in favour of women's reservation and are prepared to have it implemented right now, without linking it to delimitation," he said.

Kiren Rijiju alleged that during a private conversation, Shashi Tharoor said that Congress is anti-women —*X/SHASHI THAROOR*

Rijiju's remarks were linked to a conversation on April 18 following a special sitting of Parliament during which the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill was discussed. The Bill sought 33 per cent reservation for women in legislatures by 2029 and proposed increasing Lok Sabha seats to 816 after delimitation.

The legislation was ultimately defeated in the Lok Sabha, securing 298 votes in favour and 230 against, falling short of the required two-thirds majority.

Tharoor had earlier shared a post suggesting Rijiju had conceded he could not be labelled "anti-women", while cautioning against linking women's reservation with delimitation. —*PTI*

Rajiv Gandhi's murder convict enrols as lawyer

CHENNAI, 28 APRIL

One of the convicts in the assassination case of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, A G Perarivalan, who was released on remission in 2022, has enrolled as an advocate with the Bar Association of Tamil Nadu and Puducherry.

Perarivalan (54) donned the black robes on April 27 and will practise at the Madras High Court, focusing on legal aid for prisoners. He was formally inducted into the bar on Monday, with Chief Justice of the Madras High Court Sushrut Arvind Dharmadhikari attending the ceremony.

Bar Council chairman P S Amalraj, vice chairman S Prabakaran, and advocate C K Chandrasekkar, who moved the enrolment motion, were also present. The oath was administered by enrolment committee chairman K Balu.

Perarivalan was arrested in 1991 at the age of 19 for allegedly supplying a 9-volt battery used in the explosive device linked to the assassination. He spent 31 years in prison before being released by the Supreme Court on May 18, 2022, invoking Article 142.

He completed his law degree at Dr B R Ambedkar Law College, Bengaluru, and passed the All India Bar Examination in 2025. Perarivalan said his long legal battle inspired him to study law to assist those "wrongly confined", and he plans to focus on criminal justice and post-conviction reforms. —*PTI*

Awareness posters placed outside a pink booth managed by women polling personnel, on the eve of voting in the second phase of the West Bengal Assembly elections, in Kolkata, Nadia; Polling officials check lists of vehicle facilities available, others get EVMs ready for the elections —*PTI*

BJP eyes breach of TMC's SOUTH BENGAL fortress amid SIR shadow

The stakes are blunt. Of the 142 seats going to polls, TMC HAD WON 123 in 2021, BJP just 18 and ISF one.

West Bengal votes in the second and final phase of the assembly elections on Wednesday, it will not only be choosing 142 MLAs across the state's political heartland, but also will be deciding whether the TMC still holds its southern fortress or the BJP has finally found a road to the state secretariat, Nabanna.

If the first phase on 23 April tested whether the BJP could retain its traditional edge in north Bengal and adjoining districts, the final round shifts the battle decisively to the TMC's home turf - Kolkata, Howrah, North and South 24 Parganas, Nadia, Hooghly and Purba Bardhaman.

Despite the BJP's aggressive push five years ago, Mamata Banerjee's party swept south Bengal and retained control of the state with ease.

The verdict reinforced a familiar axiom: without breaking south Bengal, there is no road to Nabanna.

At the symbolic centre of this phase stands Bhabanipur - Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's political refuge and the BJP's chosen psychological battleground, where she faces Leader of Opposition Suvendu Adhikari in what many here call the "mother of all electoral contests".

For the BJP, phase two is not merely the final round. It is the real test of whether anti-incumbency, corruption charges and citizenship politics can breach the ruling party's strongest wall.

For the TMC, holding this belt means the road to a fourth straight term remains firmly open.

That arithmetic explains why top BJP leaders spent the campaign's final stretch almost entirely in these districts.

The BJP top brass addressed rallies and roadshows, mixing sharp attacks on corruption, infiltration, post-poll violence and women's safety with symbolic outreach at the Matua Thakurbari in Bongaon.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah's statement that Central Armed Police Forces would remain in Bengal for 60 days after polling was widely read through the prism of the 2021 post-poll violence, when allegations of murders, arson, assaults and displacement of opposition workers dominated the political discourse.

Political observers said the message was aimed at reassuring anti-TMC voters that post-poll reprisals would not follow if they voted against the ruling party.

The TMC dismissed it as fear politics, accusing the BJP of trying to run Bengal from Delhi and weaponising central agencies and institutions.

The TMC has responded with welfare politics and identity, and framed the election as a fight to protect "Bengal's rights", warning that the BJP's endgame remained "NRC and social division".

After phase one recorded 93.19 per cent polling - the highest ever in the state - Banerjee claimed the TMC had already crossed the 100-seat mark.

Sharpest battle is unfolding on voter lists

The Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls has turned deletions into perhaps the most politically sensitive issue of phase two.

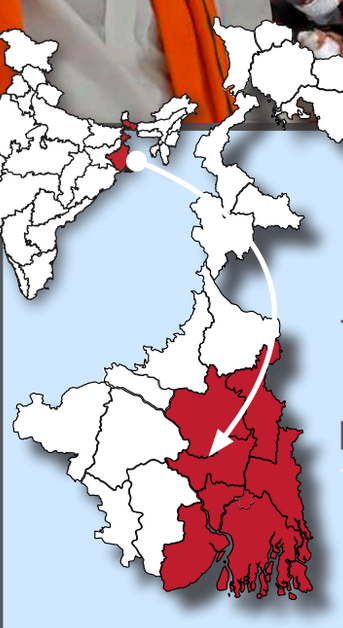
North 24 Parganas lost over 12.6 lakh names, South 24 Parganas over 10.91 lakh, Kolkata nearly 6.97 lakh, Howrah around six lakh, Hooghly 4.68 lakh and Nadia about 4.85 lakh.

In at least 25 constituencies, deleted names exceed the previous victory margin. The TMC alleges targeted deletions aimed at minorities, migrants and poor Bengali-speaking voters. The BJP argues bogus names and illegal infiltration had distorted the rolls for years.

Political observers said that where margins are thinner than deleted names, SIR can alter not only results, but the post-election narrative itself. —*PTI*

'UTTAR PRADESH OF BENGAL'S ELECTORAL MAP'

North and South 24 Parganas remain the heart of the phase 2 contest — what state politicians often call the "Uttar Pradesh of Bengal's electoral map", the twin districts whose electoral weight can make or unmake power at Nabanna.



NORTH 24 PARGANAS	SOUTH 24 PARGANAS	HOWRAH	KOLKATA
33 seats	31 seats	16 seats	11 seats
(TMC won 28, BJP 5)	(TMC won 30, RSMP 1)	(TMC won all 16)	(TMC won all 11)
NADIA	**HOOGHLY**	**PURBA BARDHAMAN**	TOTAL SEATS
17 seats	18 seats	16 seats	2021 RESULT
(TMC won 8, BJP 9)	(TMC won 14, BJP 4)	(TMC won 16)	

This has always been our strongest zone. In 2021 and even in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, people here stood with us. If we retain this belt, Bengal stays with Mamata Banerjee.
—Senior TMC leader

Without breaking south Bengal, there is no route to power for us. North 24 Parganas, Kolkata and Howrah are the real battlegrounds. This is where change has to happen.
—A BJP state leader

ALL EYES ON BHABANIPUR

Bhabanipur remains the prestige seat within that larger battle. It is effectively a rematch of Nandigram, where Suvendu Adhikari defeated Mamata Banerjee in 2021. Five years later, the duel has shifted to the TMC supremo's own bastion.

For the TMC, retaining Bhabanipur is about protecting Banerjee's authority in her backyard. For the BJP, breaching it would puncture the aura of invincibility around Bengal's most powerful leader.

Spread across eight Kolkata Municipal Corporation wards, Bhabanipur is often called "mini India" - Bengalis, Gujaratis, Marwaris, Jains, Sikhs, Muslims, and migrants from Bihar and Jharkhand packed into the prestigious seat.

Banerjee has focused unusual personal attention here — padayatras, closed-door meetings in high-rises, outreach to Jain temples and Sikh gurdwaras, and direct canvassing among non-Bengali voters.

Adhikari, after polling in Nandigram, shifted his full focus to Bhabanipur with Amit Shah closely monitoring the campaign from Kolkata. Adding to the pressure, around 51,000 names, nearly 25 per cent of the electorate, were deleted after the SIR.

By Wednesday evening, voting will end, but the answer will wait till 4 May - whether the BJP has done enough to turn north Bengal's momentum into a statewide breakthrough, or Banerjee has once again sealed the south and with it, the road to Nabanna for a fourth consecutive term.

SIR JOLTS BJP BASTIONS

Matua first family split deepens battle in Bagda and Gaighata

In Matua strongholds Bagda and Gaighata in West Bengal's North 24 Parganas district bordering Bangladesh, the election has slipped beyond the familiar BJP-TMC duel.

The battle now runs through the divided Matua first family, with brothers, wives and cousins contesting from rival camps, while the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls has stirred fresh anxieties among refugee Hindus who once voted together.

Matuas, originally from East Pakistan, are Hindus who migrated to India during the Partition and after the creation of Bangladesh.

At Thakurnagar, headquarters of the Matua Mahasangh, the anxiety is visible in tea stalls, courtyards and party offices. Families speak in hushed voices about names disappearing from the final voter list, voters being kept "under adjudication", and decades-old residents suddenly being asked to prove they belong to the area.

The Thakur family of Thakurnagar is often referred to as the Matuas' "first family" as it traces its lineage to the sect's founder Harichand Thakur, and has shaped the community's religious leadership and political direction.

The tension has made Bagda and Gaighata in the Bongaon subdivision among the most closely watched constituencies.

In Bagda, the contest has entered the Thakurbari drawing room. The TMC has fielded sitting MLA Madhuparna Thakur, daughter of Rajya Sabha MP Mamatabala Thakur. The BJP has responded with Soma Thakur, wife of Union minister Shantanu Thakur.

The result is a rare political duel between two sisters-in-law, with both claiming to represent the Matua legacy.

PM Narendra Modi prays at Matua community's main shrine, Kolkata's Thanthania Kali temple; (top left) TMC MLA Madhuparna Thakur is contesting against BJP's Soma Thakur in Bagda, a closely watched contest *PTI/X/FB*

Bagda, where Scheduled Castes account for more than 53 per cent of the electorate and Matuas make up over 40 per cent of voters, has long been seen as a political weather vane in the refugee belt.

BJP's Biswajit Das won the seat in 2021 with nearly 49 per cent of the votes. But Das later crossed over to the TMC.

Yet the BJP's decision to field Soma Thakur has not gone down well with many local workers. They wanted a local face and rallied behind former BJP MLA Dulal Bar, now contesting as an Independent.

The resentment is similar in neighbouring Gaighata, where BJP MLA Subrata Thakur, elder brother of Shantanu Thakur and chairman of the All India Matua Mahasangh, is seeking re-election.

Gaighata was one of the BJP's showcase victories in 2021. Subrata Thakur won the seat with around 47 per cent of the votes, consolidating the Matua support that had shifted towards the saffron camp after the citizenship promise.

This time, he is facing not only TMC candidate Narottam Biswas, but also discontent in his own party. Tanima Sen, a BJP mandal president, filed nomination as an Independent in protest against Subrata's candidature, accusing the party of imposing a "family candidate" and ignoring grassroots opinion.

Though she later withdrew after a truce with the BJP leadership, the episode exposed simmering anger against the "growing dominance of the Thakurbari" in party affairs.

The rebellion has been sharpened by the SIR.

According to party leaders and local estimates, around 55,000 names were deleted from electoral rolls in Bagda and nearly 39,000 in Gaighata. North 24-Parganas, the district with the largest concentration of Matua refugees, lost more than 12.3 lakh names after the revision.

The unease has produced political consequences. In Gaighata, 61 BJP workers joined the TMC after the publication of the final rolls. In Bagda, nearly 50 Matua families switched sides.

State BJP leaders dismissed talks of factionalism and said the party would still benefit from Prime Minister Narendra Modi's appeal.

For decades, the Matuas voted under the shadow of Binapani Devi, the community matriarch whose word often decided political allegiance. Today, that certainty has vanished. The same Thakur family now stands divided between the BJP and the TMC, with brothers, wives and cousins fighting from opposite camps.

The Matua vote influences at least 34 assembly seats directly and another two dozen along the Bangladesh border. BJP insiders admit that refugee and Matua-dominated belts contributed more than half of the party's 77 seats in 2021. If the BJP loses ground in Bagda and Gaighata, the tremors could travel far beyond Bongaon.

The irony is hard to miss. The BJP had once turned the Matua belt into the backbone of its Bengal rise by promising citizenship and certainty. Today, in Bagda and Gaighata, that promise is colliding with missing names, rebel candidates and a divided Thakurbari. —*PTI*

—ANI

MP govt appoints 6-member panel to draft UCC bill

BHOPAL, 28 APRIL

The Madhya Pradesh government has formed a six-member panel headed by retired Supreme Court judge Justice Ranjana Prasad Desai to draft a bill for implementing a Uniform Civil Code (UCC). The panel includes a retired IAS officer, legal expert, academician, and others. The committee has 60 days to submit its recommendations. The government emphasises the need for a UCC to govern marriage, divorce, inheritance, and social customs, studying practices across communities and models from Uttarakhand and Gujarat. The panel will seek stakeholder suggestions, ensuring recommendations are legally sound and protect women and children's rights. *—PTI*

HC judge recuses from hearing Cong MP Karti's plea

NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL

Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma of the Delhi High Court recused herself from hearing Congress MP Karti Chidambaram's plea to quash a CBI FIR, asking for the case to be listed before another bench. Karti alleges a "gross delay" in FIR registration on January 1, 2025, describing it as "malafide" and politically motivated. The case, the fourth against him, relates to irregularities in 2018 over FIPB clearance, with alleged links to his father P Chidambaram. Karti claims the FIR, registered after 20 years, was unlawful and based on unverified allegations concerning duty-free whisky sales and payments to his firm ASCPL. *—PTI*

—INSTAGRAM

Keralam actor Kareem booked for cheating

KOCHI, 28 APRIL

Actor and reality show star Shiyas Kareem has been booked for cheating, outraging modesty, and criminal intimidation, based on a complaint by his woman business partner. The complaint alleges Kareem cheated her of lakhs of rupees, promising a partnership and failing to return the money. When she demanded repayment, he allegedly threatened her. The woman, who was abroad, met Kareem via social media and entered into a business partnership. A police officer said, "A detailed probe will be carried out into the allegations and he will be interrogated soon," under Sections 318(4), 79, and 351(2) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita. *—PTI*

Wild buffaloes back in MP after 150 years

BALAGHAT, 28 APRIL

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav released four wild buffaloes from Assam's Kaziranga National Park into Kanha Tiger Reserve, marking the animal's return after 150 years. He called it "a very special day for Madhya Pradesh's wildlife," saying it will enrich forests and boost tourism and employment. The buffaloes, weighing 500kg each, included three females, and were transported in specially-designed vehicles. Yadav stated, "The arrival of the wild buffalo will strengthen the ecosystem," and thanked Assam's Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sharma. He highlighted the state's progress, including reintroducing extinct species like cheetahs, and called this a historic milestone for Madhya Pradesh's environment. *—PTI*

WhatsApp bans 9,400 a/cs over digital arrest scams

WhatsApp to remove users displaying govt insignia

NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL

The Centre took action involving telecom regulators, service providers, the RBI, tech giants and the CBI to tackle the menace of digital arrest scams. WhatsApp has banned 9,400 accounts involved in such offences, the Centre told the Supreme Court on Tuesday. The action was detailed by the Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre (I4C) of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) which filed a comprehensive status report as per the SC's directions on 9 February to curb digital arrest scams.

Chief Justice Surya Kant, who had taken suo motu cognisance of online frauds had issued directions including asking the RBI, the DoT, and others to jointly come up with a framework for providing compensation in digital arrest cases.

The fresh status report, filed through Attorney General R Venkataramani, detailed the enforcement actions taken by WhatsApp since January.

WhatsApp is deploying logo detection systems to remove accounts using police or government symbols in display pictures *—FREEPIK*

WhatsApp is deploying "enforcement innovations," including logo detection systems to identify and remove accounts using police or government insignia in display pictures, the status report said. WhatsApp is contemplating introducing a new feature to warn users when they receive a call from a "newly created" or "non-tenured" account, a common trait of scam profiles, the status report said, adding that a process to automatically hide profile pictures of suspicious callers will also be introduced.

- WhatsApp is thinking of introducing a new feature to warn users when they receive a call from a "newly created" or "non-tenured" account, a common trait of scam profiles

The DoT and the Telecom Service Providers (TSPs) have committed to a strict new timeline for neutralising fraudulent SIM cards, including the fact that the committee is working towards a mechanism to block suspicious SIM cards within 2 to 3 hours of identification, it said.

The report said the CBI has set a Rs 10 crore loss threshold for taking over digital arrest investigations. *— PTI*

TERROR AGAIN

2 stabbed in Thane IS-inspired attack

MUMBAI, 28 APRIL

Investigators have found a note referring to 'lone wolf' attacks and the Islamic State in the house of a man arrested for allegedly attacking two security guards after asking their religion in Maharashtra's Thane district, an official said on Tuesday.

The 31-year-old suspect, who had lived in the US for several years, seemed to have undergone "self-radicalisation," Chief Minister Fadnavis said.

Prima facie, the incident appeared to be a 'lone wolf' attack, and the suspect Zaib Zubair Ansari allegedly asked the guards at a construction site in the Mira Road area to recite the 'Kalma' before stabbing them on Monday. Ansari, 31, had returned to India from the US in 2020.

The Maharashtra government handed over the probe to the ATS on Monday.

Ansari lived alone at the Smita Regency building in Naya Nagar about 200 metres from the incident site, the official said. His wife, who is of

Afghan origin had gone to the US. The ATS official said the suspect first asked the two guards for directions to a mosque. The guards told him that they did not know the mosque's location. Ansari then asked them whether they were Hindus, and went away. Soon he returned, pulled out a knife, and allegedly attacked guard Subrato Sen and his supervisor Rajkumar Mishra.

Before attacking, Ansari asked the supervisor whether he was also a Hindu, and if not, he should recite the 'Kalma'. The accused stabbed them because they were unable to recite the 'Kalma', the official said. *— PTI*

All religious institutions must have rules, says SC

NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL

The Supreme Court said on Tuesday that the right to manage a religious institution does not mean absence of structure and there has to be a modality and norms for its functioning.

The observation by a nine-judge Constitution bench came while hearing petitions about discrimination against women at religious places, including the Sabarimala Temple in Kerala.

Advocate Nizam Pasha, appearing for Peerzada Syed Altamash Nizami, a direct ancestral descendent of Chisti Nizami lineage associated with the dargah of Hazrat Khwaja Nizamuddin Aulia, submitted that a dargah is a place where a saint is buried.

"Within Islam, there are differing views regarding the status of saints after death, but in the Sufi system of belief, there is deep reverence for a place where a saint is interred. The Sufi system of belief in India consists of several orders, like the Chishtiya, Qadriya, Naqshbandiya and Suhrawardiya. The present case concerns the Chishtiya order. This system, I submit, clearly constitutes a religious denomination. If one looks at the teachings attributed to Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya, there is emphasis on adherence to Islamic practices like roza, namaz, hajj, zakat, and above all, faith," Pasha said.

He contended that the right to regulate entry in a religious institution is part of management.

At this juncture, Justice Amanullah said the right to manage cannot mean absence of structure and for everything, there has to be a modality. *— PTI*

Marathi language must for all taxi and auto-rickshaw drivers in Maharashtra

MUMBAI, 28 APRIL

The Maharashtra transport department will launch a special verification drive from 1 May to 15 August to ensure effective implementation of the decision to make Marathi mandatory for auto-rickshaw and taxi drivers in the state, transport minister Pratap Sarnaik said on Tuesday.

He said that the licences of the drivers will not be cancelled solely for not knowing Marathi, but action will be taken against violators and those engaged in illegal transportation.

The drive will be carried out across all 59 RTOs under the supervision of a committee headed by Additional Transport Commissioner Ravindra Gaikwad.

"If one wants to do business in Maharashtra, knowing Marathi is essential," he said, adding that representatives of auto and taxi unions have supported the decision.

Citing a recent special drive in Mira-Bhayander, Sarnaik said that during an inspection of 3,443 auto-rickshaws, 565 drivers failed to demonstrate knowledge of Marathi. "But these drivers have shown willingness to learn the language," he said.

The committee headed by Gaikwad will monitor the campaign on a daily and weekly basis, and issue directions to RTOs based on inspection reports, he added.

Facilities will be provided at RTO offices for drivers willing to learn Marathi, with training support from the Mumbai Marathi Sahitya Sangh. Booklets and e-material will also be made available, according to Sarnaik.

Drivers who complete the training will be issued certificates by the state government, which will be required at the time of licence renewal, the minister said. *—PTI*

Jamia students protest against RSS function

NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL

Around 50 students of Jamia Millia Islamia staged a protest on the campus on Tuesday, opposing a programme marking 100 years of the RSS.

Amidst the heavy presence of Delhi Police and the Rapid Action Force, students held placards saying, 'Jamia is our university, not your shakha' and 'reject saffronisation of our campus.'

"The RSS is trying to get their chief guest inside the auditorium through one of the many entrances, but we are protesting right outside the auditorium," one of the protesting students said.

The protesters, affiliated with left-leaning student organisations like the SFI and AISA, urged the RSS functionaries present there to leave the campus immediately.

The RSS-linked event, being held as part of the 'Yuva Kumbh' initiative to celebrate the organisation's centenary, had drawn objections a day earlier from the SFI's Jamia unit, which termed it a "direct provocation."

AISA Delhi president and Jamia student Saiyed alleged differential treatment by the university administration.

"This is the same Jamia where other student groups are not even allowed to hold debates without security intervention, but the RSS has been permitted to organise a full programme in an air-conditioned hall," he said.

He added that students would continue to resist similar events in the future to "defend our democratic rights."

The tension at the Jamia comes in the backdrop of Delhi University colleges holding RSS-linked events, which have drawn flak from several students and teachers' organisations. *— PTI*

WEATHER WOES

Heatwave: NHRC asks 21 states, Delhi to protect those vulnerable

NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL

Pointing to the disproportionate impact of heatwaves and intensity on marginalised sections, the NHRC on Tuesday asked 21 states and Delhi to take advance action to protect those vulnerable.

The elderly, children, infants and newborns are especially susceptible to extreme heat. Heatwaves can also lead to the loss of livelihoods and an increased risk of fire, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) said in a statement.

The NHRC asked 21 states and Delhi to take advance action and implement relief measures to protect vulnerable populations.The Commission in a letter to the chief secretaries emphasised the urgent need for inclusive measures.

The NHRC also highlighted the risks faced by economically weaker sections, outdoor workers, the elderly, children, newborns and especially the homeless due to heatwaves, the statement said.

New Delhi city recorded temperatures around the mid-40 degrees Celsius on Tuesday *—PTI*

Highlighting NCRB data on the reported deaths of about 3,712 people in India due to heat or sunstroke between 2019-23, the Commission urged them to plan relief measures as per their existing standard operating procedures or guidelines issued by the NDMA to mitigate the impact of heatwaves, it said.

WATER SUPPLY CUT

With the IMD predicting a below-normal monsoon this year due to El Niño, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) announced on Tuesday a 10 per cent water cut in the city from 15 May.

Speaking to reporters after a pre-monsoon review meeting, BMC commissioner Ashwini Bhide said the overall stock in the seven lakes supplying water to the city stood at 28.35 per cent, which is expected to last till 6 July. *— PTI*

Probe tribal protest against Odisha mining project: Cong

PUNE, 28 APRIL

The Congress on Tuesday slammed the Centre over protests by tribal groups against a bauxite mining project in Odisha's Sijimali and demanded an independent inquiry into the unrest.

Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said Odisha is no stranger to public protests by tribals when mining projects that have major ecological impacts are sought to be bulldozed. "The Union Minister of Tribal Affairs (Jual Oram) is also from Odisha. He should demonstrate greater sensitivity and order an inquiry into the unrest at Sijimali and ensure that PESA, 1996 and FRA, 2006 are implemented both in letter and spirit in a credible, transparent and participatory manner," Ramesh said on X. The protest is against a bauxite mining project in Sijimali in Rayagada and Kalahandi districts.

The rights of affected local communities guaranteed by laws passed unanimously by Parliament have reportedly been deliberately diluted or even bypassed, Ramesh alleged. *— PTI*

DALIT PROTEST

Keralam hartal over student death hits life

THIRU'PURAM, 28 APRIL

A state-wide hartal called by Dalit organisations seeking justice for Kannur dental college student Nithin Raj is being observed across Kerala on Tuesday.

The protest affected normal life, as Dalit activists blocked vehicles in many parts of the state. Incidents of hartal supporters forcing shops to shut were also reported.

In many areas, including the state capital and Kannur, hartal supporters blocked vehicles. However, two-wheelers were allowed to pass.

Dalit organisations had announced the state-wide hartal on Monday, demanding justice for Nithin Raj. The hartal is being observed from 6 am to 6 pm on Tuesday.

Protesters block roads in Thiruvananthapuram on Tuesday *—ANI*

Around 52 Dalit organisations, including the Justice for Nithin Raj Action Council, called the strike.

The organisations had said on Monday that no vehicle would be forcibly stopped and that all essential services would be exempted.

Raj, a first-year BDS student at a private dental college in Ancharakandi in Kannur district, was found critically injured after falling from a building on 10 April and later died.

Police have registered a case against two faculty members on charges of abetment of suicide and under the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, following allegations by the student's family that he was subjected to caste harassment.

Kerala Pinnokka Samudaya Munnani (KPSM) president KV Padmanabhan and general secretary S Anwar said the probe was being wilfully misdirected.

While the family has alleged caste discrimination and mental harassment by faculty members led to the student's death, the police are attempting to divert the investigation towards loan app borrowings, they said. The organisation alleged that this was a planned move to protect the suspects. *—PTI*

India to receive fourth S-400 system in May

NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL

India is expected to receive the fourth unit of the S-400 Triumf surface-to-air missile system from Russia next month, sources said on Tuesday. In October 2018, India signed a USD 5 billion deal with Russia to procure five units of the missile systems and three of them have already been delivered.

The sources said the fifth unit of the missile will be delivered by November. The S-400 missile systems played a crucial role during Operation Sindoor.

Last month, New Delhi cleared the procurement of a fresh batch of five S-400 missile systems from Russia that will take the total number to 10. It is learnt that the fourth unit of the missile system has already been shipped and it is expected to reach India soon.

India had signed the deal for procurement of the S-400 missiles over seven years back ignoring a warning by the US that the contract may result in US sanctions. *— PTI*

Iran told me it's in state of collapse: Don

Says Iran wants help opening Hormuz; Rubio rejects Iran's bid to end war without nuke deal

WASHINGTON, 28 APRIL

US President Donald Trump claimed on Truth Iran has "just" informed him it is "in a state of collapse".

"They want us to open the Hormuz Strait as soon as possible, as they try to figure out their leadership situation," Trump posted on his Truth Social on Tuesday.

He added that he believes they will be able to sort out reported divisions within the Islamic Republic government about negotiations with the US.

The White House did not immediately respond to questions about who on the Iranian side delivered the message, who in the Republican administration received it and whether the communications were conducted directly with the US or through an intermediary.

Iran did not comment on it either at the time of publishing. Trump has previously claimed that the US was speaking to Iranian officials even though Tehran has repeatedly denied such claims.

Trump's comments come a day after Iran said it was willing to open the Strait of Hormuz, through which nearly a fifth of the world's oil once passed, provided that its nuclear programme was not discussed in any future negotiations.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, however, dismissed the idea.

"There's no doubt in my mind that at some point in the future, if this radical clerical regime remains in charge in Iran, they will decide they want a nuclear weapon," Rubio said on Fox News. "That still remains the core issue here."

Israeli bombardment of Gaza has left less than 5 per cent of the cropland's area available for cultivation, according to a UN body; Iranian rescue workers continue to clear through rubble and look for people after Israeli-US attacks —THE FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANISATION/IRAN RED CRESCENT

> **An entire nation is being humiliated by the Iranian leadership, especially by these so-called Revolutionary Guards. I hope that this ends as quickly as possible... The Iranians are obviously very skilled at negotiating, or rather, very skillful at not negotiating, letting the Americans travel to Islamabad and then leave again without any result.**
>
> —Friedrich Merz, German Chancellor

"We have to ensure that any deal that is made, any agreement that is made, is one that definitively prevents them from sprinting towards a nuclear weapon at any point," he said.

Iranian Deputy Defense Minister Brigadier General Reza Talaei Nik, however, said that Iran would only open the Strait under Tehran's conditions, while acknowledging concerns about its closure.

Meanwhile, Israel continued to pound Lebanon, despite a ceasefire between the countries. The extent of the damage was not immediately clear, but Lebanese state-media National News Agency reported several casualties in the strike on several towns and villages. Israel's Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar said, "Israel has no territorial ambitions in Lebanon," even as its troops occupy a significant portion of Lebanese territory to establish a "security zone". —*Agencies*

Israel-Ukraine feud over grains 'stolen' by Russia escalates

Ukraine summoned the Israeli envoy to its country over a lack of an "appropriate" response for purchasing grain that Russia "stole" from occupied-Ukraine after a second Moscow-flagged ship allegedly docked in Haifa. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy stated on X that Kyiv was preparing a sanctions package for countries buying such goods, hours after Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha stated that allowing such transits was "harming the relations" between the countries. Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar responded that diplomatic relations aren't conducted on Twitter. Russia occupies about a fifth of Ukrainian territory, and Kyiv considers all goods produced from that land as "stolen".

— SCREENGRAB

Mexico's military captures top cartel leader

MEXICO CITY, 28 APRIL

The Mexican military has captured a key leader of the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG), two months after their leader was killed. Audias Flores Silva, known as "El Jardinero," was seen as a possible successor to the slain "El Mencho," with the US offering a $5 million reward for information. Flores Silva was detained near El Mirador, Nayarit, without injuries. He was the head of security for Oseguera Cervantes and helped lead drug operations in Nayarit, Jalisco, Mexico State, and Zacatecas. US Ambassador Ronald Johnson called his arrest an "important step" in fighting fentanyl trafficking. Flores Silva, previously jailed in the US, faces extradition on drug and firearms charges. —*PTI*

Imran Khan treated for eye issue, returns to prison

ISLAMABAD, 28 APRIL

Imran Khan, Pakistan's former prime minister, was treated at Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS) for his right eye ailment before being returned to prison. The 74-year-old was diagnosed with right central retinal vein occlusion (CRVO) in January and received an anti-VEGF injection, his fourth, during his latest visit. PIMS officials said he was examined by ophthalmologists and found to be stable, with "clinical improvement" shown in scans. Khan's family and PTI leaders demand he be transferred to a private hospital with family present. His wife Bushra Bibi underwent eye surgery earlier this month and remains in jail. Khan and Bushra are serving sentences in the Al-Qadir Trust case. —*PTI*

Islamic State militants kill 29 in Nigeria

ABUJA, 28 APRIL

Militants with the Islamic State group attacked a village overnight in northeastern Nigeria, killing at least 29 people, authorities said Monday. The attack took place late on Sunday in Guyaku, a village in the Gombi local government area in the country's Adamawa state, according to the state governor. The Islamic State group claimed responsibility for the attack in a message on the Telegram messaging app. Adamawa State Governor Ahmadu Umaru Fintiri denounced the attack as tragic and unacceptable during a visit to the village on Monday. —*PTI*

Jessica Mann testifies 3rd time against Weinstein

NEW YORK, 28 APRIL

Actress Jessica Mann again took the witness stand Monday, testifying for a third time about her allegations against Harvey Weinstein. She recounted meeting Weinstein at an engagement party in 2013, describing him as "looking very jolly," and said she gave him her number, thinking it was a professional connection. Mann alleged Weinstein raped her in a Manhattan hotel that year, despite his denial. She testified she was sometimes so broke she lived in her car but was excited by Weinstein's interest. Mann, now 40, detailed a complicated relationship and said she was ready for justice, stating, "I am willing to endure this as many times as it takes." —*PTI*

DON'S FRAGILE RELATIONS

Want to live in Buckingham Palace: Trump meets King

UK's Queen Camilla, King Charles III, US President Donald Trump and First Lady Melania Trump at the White House, on Tuesday —*PTI*

WASHINGTON, 28 APRIL

US President Donald Trump said on Tuesday that he "always wanted to live in Buckingham Palace" ahead of his meeting with UK's King Charles III in Washington.

Trump shared a news article on his Truth Social claiming that he was the cousin of the the King and said he would speak to King Charles and Queen Camilla about it in a "few minutes".

Charles, meanwhile, was set to become the first British monarch to address the US Congress since his mother, Queen Elizabeth II, in 1991. Her speech highlighted the shared history of both countries and the importance of their democratic values.

Charles, meanwhile, was expected to say: "Time and again, our two countries have always found ways to come together," and call for "reconciliation and renewal" between the US and UK.

The King, accompanied by Camilla, began their day with a meeting at the White House with Trump.

The Republican has displayed a fondness of the Royal Family, at a time when relations between the US and Europe have been strained by Trump's tariffs and his threats to annex Greenland.

Meanwhile, Charles has faced some calls on Capitol Hill to meet with victims of Jeffrey Epstein while he is in the US.

There's no indication that he will do so, even as the scandal involving the convicted sex offender has ensnared his brother Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor, who was arrested in February over misconduct allegations, which he denies. —*Agencies*

Trump moves to use import taxes instead of tariffs

WASHINGTON, 28 APRIL

After the Supreme Court struck down President Donald Trump's tariffs imposed under the 1977 International Emergency Economic Powers Act in February his administration is moving to replace them before temporary levies expire 24 July.

The Office of the US Trade Representative begins Section 301 hearings this week. One investigation examines whether sixty economies accounting for ninety nine percent of US imports do enough to block goods made with forced labor

Another next week targets sixteen trading partners including China the EU and Japan over alleged overproduction harming US manufacturers.

US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer said, "for too long American workers and firms have been forced to compete against foreign producers.

Critics say revenues are predetermined. Scott Lincicome said "the cake is already baked. Joyce Adetutu said Section 301 gives Trump the cover of the process itself"'.

Courts may still face fresh challenges but analysts said the law offers clearer procedures than the emergency statute. —*PTI*

Bill to create buffer zones around places of worship tabled

A bill has been introduced in the US Congress to create a 100-feet buffer zone around places of worship, including churches, temples, synagogues and gurdwaras. Democrat Congressman Tom Suozzi and Republican Congressman Max Miller introduced the SACREDAct which treat any harassment or intimidation within such areas a federal crime. The bill relies on the right to religious worship.

Trump sets 1 June deadline to end DHS shutdown

Trump lambasted Democrats over the ongoing funding deadlock for the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), accusing them of obstructing support for immigration enforcement agencies amid a prolonged shutdown. In a post on Truth Social, Trump told Republicans to "unify" and bypass the senate by 1 June, saying the shutdown has been in effect since 14 February.

Kimmel calls Melania 'expectant widow', Trump says fire him

Donald and Melania Trump both called on ABC to fire Jimmy Kimmel after a joke last week in which the late-night comic described the First Lady as having "the glow of an expectant widow." Trump alleged that the comic's comment, delivered at a mock White House Correspondents' Association dinner incited the shooting incident at the real event two days later.

Starmer's ex-chief of staff apologies for endorsing Mandelson

LONDON, 28 APRIL

UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer's former chief of staff Morgan McSweeney said he made a "serious mistake" by recommending Peter Mandelson as the UK ambassador to the US, but denied interfering with the appointment process.

McSweeney told lawmakers on the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee on Tuesday that it had been "a serious error of judgment" to back Mandelson. The committee is investigating how Mandelson, a scandal-tainted friend of Jeffrey Epstein, was given the key diplomatic job despite failing security checks.

McSweeney said that "the Prime Minister relied on my advice, and I got it wrong." He apologised to Epstein's victims, saying, "I am sorry for any part this has played in causing further hurt or distress."

His testimony came as Starmer faced more heat over the appointment, with lawmakers set to vote on whether the Prime Minister should be investigated by a parliamentary standards watchdog.

If a Conservative Party for Parliament's Privileges Committee is constituted and concludes Starmer misled the House, he may step down.

Starmer fired Mandelson in September and McSweeney resigned in February after the former envoy allegedly leaked information to Epstein. —*PTI*

Pak strikes kill 7, wound 85 in Afghan: Taliban

KABUL, 28 APRIL

Pakistani strikes on homes and a university in Afghanistan's Asadabad killed seven people and wounded 85, said Taliban Deputy Spokesperson Hamdullah Fitrat.

Fitrat said on Monday that Pakistani mortars and missiles, besides Asadabad, also struck other areas of the eastern Kunar province, with Afghanistan's Ministry of Higher Education saying that about 30 students and professors were wounded in the attack on the university.

Fitrat called the attacks "unforgivable war crimes" .

Pakistan denied the attack. "Pakistan's targeting is precise and intelligence-based. No strike has been carried out on Sayed Jamaluddin Afghan University. The claims are frivolous and fake," its Information Ministry said.

The strikes were the first after days after peace talks held in the China's Urumqi earlier in April. The two nations are currently observing a ceasefire. The clashes erupted after Pakistan accused the Taliban of harbouring terrorists. —*Agencies*

Medical workers treat a child allegedly injured by Pakistani mortar and missiles in Afghanistan's Asadabad on Monday —X @FITRATHAMD

IRAQ COALITION TAPS ALI AL-ZAIDI FOR PM AFTER DEADLOCK AND TRUMP'S THREATS

BAGHDAD, 28 APRIL

Iraq's dominant parliamentary bloc on Monday nominated businessman and political newcomer Ali al-Zaidi as prime minister after weeks of internal wrangling over a compromise candidate.

The Coordination Framework, a coalition of Shiite parties allied with Iran, announced the decision after a meeting at the government palace.

The bloc had earlier backed former prime minister Nouri al-Maliki, but shifted course after US President Donald Trump opposed his return and threatened to cut aid to Iraq.

In a statement, the coalition thanked al-Maliki and incumbent Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani for their "historic and responsible positions" in withdrawing their candidacies to end the deadlock.

Al-Zaidi, chairman of Al-Janoob Islamic Bank, has not previously held political office. The nominee has 30 days to present a Cabinet that must win 167 parliamentary votes. —*PTI*

'STEALING CONTENT'

Aus proposes taxing Meta, Google, TikTok to fund newsrooms

MELBOURNE, 28 APRIL

Australia has proposed taxing digital giants Meta, Google and TikTok a proportion of their revenue to pay for news reporters.

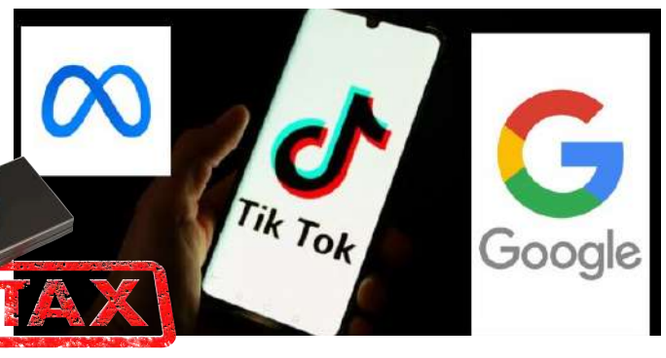
The draft legislation, released on Tuesday, aims to create incentives for these companies to strike deals with news organisations, paying for content. It is set to be introduced in Parliament by 2 June.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese emphasised the importance of valuing journalists' work, stating, "It shouldn't just be able to be taken by a large multinational corporation and used to generate profits for that organisation with no compensation appropriate for the people who produce that creative content."

The plan is Australia's second attempt, following the 2021 News Media Bargaining Code, which encouraged platforms to negotiate with publishers. The new measure would impose a 2.25 per cent tax on platforms that do not reach agreements, with revenue distributed based on journalists employed.

Opposing the proposed legislation, Meta said in a statement that news organisations "voluntarily post content on our platforms because they receive value from doing so... The idea that we take their news content is simply wrong"

Google said the legislation "ignores the fact that Google already has commercial agreements with the news industry, misunderstands how the ad market changed, and mandates payments from some companies while arbitrarily excluding platforms like Microsoft, Snapchat and OpenAI." —*PTI*



— PTI

Rupee falls 41P to close at 94.56 against USD

MUMBAI, 28 APRIL

The Indian rupee weakened by 41 paise to close at 94.56 (provisional) against the US dollar on Tuesday, pressured by elevated crude oil prices and sustained foreign capital outflows amid rising geopolitical uncertainty. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the rupee opened at 94.35, fell to an intra-day low of 94.58, and settled at 94.56, down from Monday's close of 94.15, when it had gained just one paisa. Forex traders said the currency has already depreciated sharply, factoring in a widening current account deficit and volatile capital flows. Persistent FII outflows, over USD 19 billion this year, further weighed on sentiment. Meanwhile, the dollar index rose 0.24 per cent to 98.73. —*PTI*

Gold falls Rs 1,800, silver drops Rs 6,500

NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL

Gold prices declined by Rs 1,800 to Rs 1.54 lakh per 10 grams, and silver plunged Rs 6,500 to Rs 2.44 lakh per kilogram amid rising crude oil rates and a strong US dollar, impacting global bullion markets. The All India Sarafa Association reported gold fell Rs 1,800, or 1.15 per cent, from Rs 1,56,100 on Monday. Silver dropped by nearly 3 per cent, from Rs 2,50,500. Saumil Gandhi of HDFC Securities said, "Gold dropped to a three-week low as rising energy prices heightened inflation concerns and reinforced expectations for higher interest rates." Internationally, spot gold fell USD 95.37, or 2.04 per cent, to USD 4,586.50 per ounce, while silver declined USD 2.33, or 3.09 per cent, to USD 73.18. —*PTI*

PhonePe hits 50M merchants across India

NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL

Fintech giant PhonePe has surpassed 50 million registered merchants across India, marking a key milestone since its launch in 2016. The company, preparing for its IPO, highlighted its growth from QR code payments to offering comprehensive financial services, including working capital loans, POS terminals, and SmartSpeakers. Chief Business Officer Yuvraj Singh Shekhawat stated, "Reaching 50 million merchants is a significant milestone in our effort to make financial services more accessible to merchants across India. For many of our partners, the journey began with a simple QR code, but that relationship has since matured. Today, digital payments serve as a gateway to a wider range of formal services, including credit."—*PTI*

Peak power demand nears record for 2nd time

NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL

India's peak power demand neared a record for the second consecutive day on Monday, reaching 255.85GW, driven by intense heatwave conditions across North, Central, and Western India. The surge resulted from increased use of cooling appliances like air conditioners and desert coolers. The power ministry's data showed demand rising in the second half of April, touching 252.07GW on 24 April and surpassing this on 25 April with 256.11GW. On Sunday, demand moderated to 238.15GW, influenced by dust storms and scattered rains, which curtailed consumption. The highest supply was 237.21GW, leaving a shortfall of 0.93GW. Last summer's peak was 242.77GW in June 2025, staying below the government's estimate of 277GW. —*PTI*

Google-Adani data centre breaks ground in Andhra

The $15 billion centre will be functional by 2028

TARLUVADA, 28 APRIL

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu during the foundation-stone laying ceremony of the Google Cloud India AI Hub, in Visakhapatnam on Tuesday —*PTI*

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Tuesday laid the foundation for a USD 15 billion Google Artificial Intelligence data centre near Visakhapatnam. Union IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw attended the event.

The 1-gigawatt (GW) facility at Tarluvada, to be developed by Google (via Raiden Infotech India Pvt. Ltd.) in partnership with AdaniConneX and Bharti Airtel's Nxtra, will span over 600 acres across Tarluvada, Adavivaram, Mudasarlova and Rambilli in Visakhapatnam and Anakapalli. The investment, to be rolled out between 2026 and 2030, includes Rs 17,000 crore for renewable energy, forming part of a planned 6.5 GW digital ecosystem in the state.

Naidu described the project as the "pride of North Andhra", saying it would create thousands of jobs and help reverse migration. He added that the facility, expected to be inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 28 September, 2028.

However, the project has also brought water sustainability into focus. Large AI data centres require vast quantities of water for cooling servers. Recent reports indicate rising groundwater stress in parts of Visakhapatnam due to low aquifer storage, while coastal areas face risks of seawater intrusion affecting water quality.

In addition, several urban local bodies in Andhra Pradesh already experience seasonal shortages, with drinking water supplied only once every few days in some areas during peak summer.

Addressing these concerns, Naidu assured that the state would channel water from the Godavari river to Visakhapatnam and Anakapalli within 60 days to support both industrial and domestic needs.

THE BULLET TRAIN PITCH

Highlighting infrastructure growth, Naidu said Vaishnaw has proposed a high-speed bullet train corridor connecting key southern cities, including Hyderabad, Chennai, Bengaluru and the upcoming capital Amaravati.

The proposed network is expected to be developed over the next seven to eight years, reducing travel time between these cities to about one hour and ten minutes. —*PTI*

SENSEX FALLS BELOW 77K PTS

Market sentiment remained under pressure amid a sharp rise in crude oil prices —*AI*

Markets slide as oil crosses $110 mark

MUMBAI, 28 APRIL

Benchmark equity indices BSE Sensex and NSE Nifty retreated on Tuesday as a surge in global oil prices and continued foreign fund outflows weighed on investor sentiment.

The 30-share Sensex declined 416.72 points, or 0.54 per cent, to close at 76,886.91, after falling as much as 562.57 points intra-day. The broader Nifty dropped 97 points, or 0.40 per cent, to settle at 23,995.70.

Market sentiment remained under pressure amid a sharp rise in crude oil prices, with Brent crude climbing 2.97 per cent to USD 111.4 per barrel. Analysts pointed to continued disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz, a key global oil transit chokepoint, alongside rupee depreciation beyond 94.5 against the US dollar and persistent foreign institutional investor (FII) outflows, as key macroeconomic concerns.

Among Sensex constituents, major laggards included Axis Bank, HCL Technologies, InterGlobe Aviation, Maruti Suzuki, State Bank of India and ICICI Bank.

In contrast, Reliance Industries, Bharti Airtel, Tech Mahindra and Sun Pharmaceutical Industries ended higher.

Foreign institutional investors offloaded equities worth Rs 1,151.48 crore on Monday, according to exchange data.

Elsewhere, Asian markets were mixed, with declines in Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong, while Seoul ended higher.

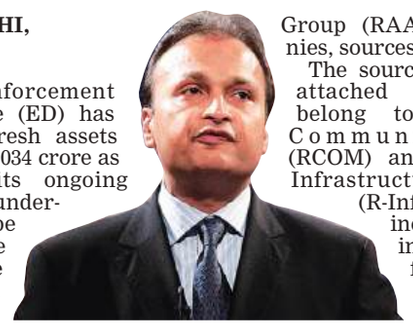
European markets traded in positive territory, and US markets closed flat on Monday. On Monday, the Sensex had surged 639.42 points to 77,303.63, while the Nifty rose 194.75 points to 24,092.70. —*PTI*

Coal India shares jump 5% post Q4 earnings

Shares of Coal India Ltd rose 5 per cent in trade Tuesday after the state-owned miner reported an 11.1 per cent rise in consolidated net profit for March quarter, driven by higher revenue. The stock gained 4.63 per cent to Rs 473.90 on BSE and 4.72 per cent on NSE. Profit stood at Rs 10,839.18 crore against Rs 9,751.64 crore a year earlier. Revenue rose to Rs 46,490.03 crore; expenses increased to Rs 37,107.07 crore in period.

ED attaches Rs 3,034 cr in probe against Anil

NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL



- The probe investigates outstanding loans of approximately Rs 40,185 crore taken from various lenders including SBI and PNB.

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has attached fresh assets worth Rs 3,034 crore as part of its ongoing money laundering probe against the Reliance Anil Ambani Group (RAAG) companies, sources said.

The sources said the attached properties belong to Reliance Communications (RCOM) and Reliance Infrastructure Ltd. (R-Infra). These include a flat in Mumbai, a farmhouse in Khandala, a hill station in Maharashtra, some land parcels in Sanand (Ahmedabad) and 7.71 crore shares of R-Infra, among others.

The central agency issued a provisional attachment order under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) to attach these assets.

The total attachment of properties in the cases against the RAAG now stands at Rs 19,344 crore. The Group is being investigated by the ED on charges of bank fraud and diversion of funds, sources said. —*PTI*

India gets 30% of industrial goods from China: GTRI

NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL

China accounts for around 16 per cent of India's total imports, but its dominance is significantly higher in industrial goods, supplying as much as 30.8 per cent of the country's requirements, think tank GTRI (Global Trade Research Initiative) said on Tuesday.

The country's imports increased to USD 774.98 billion in 2025-26. Out of this, USD 131.63 billion was from China.

The GTRI analysis said that about 66 per cent of India's imports from China, valued at USD 82.6 billion, are clustered in electronics, machinery, computers, and organic chemicals.

China accounts for 43 per cent of India's electronics imports, 40 per cent of machinery and computer imports, and 44 per cent of organic chemicals.

"These are not discretionary purchases but core inputs that feed directly into India's manufacturing ecosystem," Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) Founder Ajay Srivastava said.

He said that the Indian industry relies heavily on Chinese inputs such as electronics parts, EV batteries, solar modules, APIs and specialty chemicals.

"As a result, even as India tries to grow exports, its supply chains remain tied to China. This creates clear risks," he added. The GTRI suggested that India needs to build domestic capacity in key sectors and diversify supply chains. —*PTI*

Peak XV exits MobiKwik in Rs 130 cr deal

NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL

Venture capital firm Peak XV Partners has fully exited from fintech firm One MobiKwik Systems through a block deal of over Rs 130 crore, sources aware of the development said.

According to sources, Peak XV was one of the early investors in the firm and exited at three times of its investment value. "Peak XV Partners has sold around 61 lakh shares, about 7.7 per cent of the company share capital, at an average sale price of Rs 214 share apiece. The total deal size is close to Rs 130 crore. With this sale, Peak XV has completely exited from the firm," a source said. Florintree, Viridian Asset Management, Dymon Asia and Karma Capital have bought stakes from Peak XV.

The development comes a day after the company announced RBI granting a NBFC license for its new subsidiary- MobiKwik Financial Services Pvt Ltd. —*PTI*

BLACKSTONE-BACKED BAGMANE TO LAUNCH RS 3,405 CR IPO

NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL

Bagmane Prime Office REIT, backed by Blackstone, is set to launch its Rs 3,405 crore initial public offering (IPO) on 5 May. The Bengaluru-based REIT owns and develops Grade A+ office assets, with the IPO closing on 7 May.

Anchor investor bidding is scheduled for 4 May.

The issue includes a fresh issue of units worth Rs 2,390 crore and an offer-for-sale (OFS) of units up to Rs 1,015 crore by the seller.

Proceeds will be used to acquire Luxor at Bagmane Capital Tech Park, spanning one million sq ft, and partly fund the acquisition of a 93 per cent stake in Bagmane Rio, which owns 1.1 million sq ft of office space. —*PTI*

Exporters raise concerns on costs, MSME challenges

NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL

Industry representatives highlighted issues related to compliance costs, testing requirements, and difficulties faced by MSMEs in entering export markets during a meeting with Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal on 27 April, an official statement said. The minister assured ongoing support, including facilitation and targeted measures to reduce entry barriers and improve ease of doing business.

Goyal urged exporters and industry bodies to fully leverage India's trade agreements with developed nations to expand market access, boost exports, and create employment. The statement noted, "Industry representatives raised issues relating to compliance costs, testing requirements, and challenges faced by MSMEs in entering export markets." India's total merchandise and services exports reached a record USD 860.09 billion in 2025–26. Sectors such as engineering goods, electronics, pharmaceuticals, chemicals, gems & jewellery, and agri-products maintained export momentum. —*PTI*

Indian-Kiwi FTA to boost exports of single malt whisky

NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL

Duty concessions on Indian liquor under the free trade agreement with New Zealand will boost exports of single malt whisky and enhance price competitiveness for other items in the island nation, industry body CIABC said on Tuesday.

The Confederation of Indian Alcoholic Beverage Companies (CIABC) also said that given the current low export base, the agreement is likely to support market entry and brand building, particularly in segments such as whisky, rum and premium Indian spirits.

'The FTA is expected to provide duty-free access for Indian alcoholic beverage exports into New Zealand, improving price competitiveness for Indian products in that market,' the body's Director General Anant S Iyer said. India's exports of spirits are just around USD 1 million per annum to New Zealand. Currently, some premium liquors, particularly Indian single malts, are being exported to New Zealand.

Hopefully with the free trade agreement in place, Indian alcobev companies will increase their focus and develop the market, he said, adding that wines and beer have more consumption share in New Zealand.

'With duty concessions on Indian liquor, we see exports of Indian single malts, which have earned laurels globally, getting a boost in New Zealand,' Iyer said. —*PTI*

LINKEDIN REPORT

'Infosys, Accenture top firms for career growth'

NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL

Bengaluru continues to lead as the prominent talent hub for top companies —*ANI*

IT major Infosys has emerged as the top company for career growth in India, followed by Accenture and Amazon, according to LinkedIn's '2026 Top Companies' list released on Tuesday.

The 10th edition of the annual list, which features 25 large companies, is dominated by technology powerhouses, global consulting firms, and financial giants. JPMorgan Chase and SAP secured the fourth and fifth positions, respectively.

The 2026 list witnessed ten new entrants. Notable new additions include tech firms such as SAP, NVIDIA, HP, Microsoft, Sandisk, Marvell Technology, and Thomson Reuters.

Geographically, Bengaluru continues to lead as the prominent talent hub for these top companies.

Hyderabad follows closely, while Delhi, Mumbai, and Chennai remain key hiring centres for large corporations.

The report highlighted a shifting focus in hiring trends, noting that companies are increasingly looking for professionals who can blend technical fluency with human skills—such as communication and problem-solving—that artificial intelligence (AI) cannot replace.

'Companies across technology, finance, and software are looking for professionals who can pair irreplaceable human strengths with the ability to work alongside AI to maximise efficiency and value,' Nirajita Banerjee, LinkedIn Career Expert and India Senior Managing Editor, said. —*PTI*

7.4L Accenture workers get Microsoft 365 Copilot

NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL

- This is one of the largest enterprise deployments of generative AI.

Global professional services firm Accenture has rolled out Microsoft 365 Copilot across its workforce of approximately 7.43 lakh employees, marking one of the largest enterprise deployments of generative AI to date, according to a Microsoft source.

The company reports significant productivity improvements, with 97 per cent of employees saying routine tasks are completed up to 15 times faster, and 53 per cent noting notable efficiency gains.

Accenture began its Copilot journey in 2023 with a pilot involving senior leaders before expanding to tens of thousands of users and the broader workforce. The rollout was supported by a structured strategy emphasising data governance, training, and real-time feedback on tool usage in applications like Outlook, Teams, and Word.

Tony Leraris, Accenture's CIO, describes Copilot as a personal digital colleague that transforms work processes. In marketing, Copilot helps draft and edit content, while at client level, AI tools at Avanade have increased sales opportunities by 43 per cent among active users. —*PTI*

— PTI

NYC boroughs to play host to free WC fans events

NEW YORK, 28 APRIL

New York City will host free World Cup fan events across all five boroughs to allow supporters to experience the tournament without high ticket costs, officials announced on Monday. The events will include watch parties and related festivities at Rockefeller Center in Manhattan, the Billie Jean King National Tennis Center in Queens, Brooklyn Bridge Park in Brooklyn, a shopping area near Yankee Stadium in the Bronx, and a minor league baseball stadium in Staten Island. A separate fan event at Sports Illustrated Stadium in Harrison, New Jersey, home of the New York Red Bulls, will charge $10. World Cup matches will be held at MetLife Stadium in New Jersey, where transport costs could reach $150. The Mayour of the New York Mayor Zohran Mamdani has said the aim is to ensure that fans can enjoy the tournament affordably. Similar events are planned in other US host cities. —*PTI*

MI desperate for revival against in-form SRH

With five defeats in seven matches, Mumbai sits at 9th spot

MUMBAI, 28 APRIL

Five-time champions Mumbai Indians will look for a dramatic turnaround against an in-form Sunrisers Hyderabad in a crucial Indian Premier League clash at the Wankhede Stadium on Wednesday.

With five defeats in seven matches, including a record 103-run loss to Chennai Super Kings, Mumbai sit ninth with four points and a net run rate of -0.736. Their campaign has been derailed by underwhelming returns from key players, including skipper Hardik Pandya (97 runs, 3 wickets) and Suryakumar Yadav (110 runs).

Tilak Varma's maiden IPL century against Gujarat Titans briefly revived hopes, but the heavy defeat to CSK exposed persistent issues. Jasprit Bumrah (2 wickets) has struggled, unusually opening the bowling due to lack of support from Trent Boult and Deepak Chahar, who have managed just one wicket each.

The absence of Rohit Sharma has further hurt, with Danish Malewar failing to impress. Fitness concerns around Rohit remain, while the inclusion of Keshav Maharaj for injured Mitchell Santner and a possible role for Will Jacks add to selection dilemmas.

In contrast, Hyderabad appear better placed despite a three-match losing streak against Mumbai. They come into the game after a commanding win over Rajasthan Royals, shrugging off a remarkable knock by 15-year-old Vaibhav Sooryavanshi.

Abhishek Sharma has been in outstanding form, scoring 380 runs at a strike rate above 212, while Ishan Kishan (312) and Heinrich Klaasen (349) have bolstered the batting.

More, however, is expected from Travis Head (186).

Captain Pat Cummins's return also strengthens the side, currently placed third on the table and eyeing another playoff push.

The match begins at 7.30pm, on Wednesday. —*PTI*

Bad luck, hesitation behind collapse: Axar Patel

NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL

Delhi Capitals skipper Axar Patel blamed a mix of hesitation and bad luck for his side's dramatic batting collapse against Royal Challengers Bengaluru in the Indian Premier League.

Delhi were reduced to a shocking six for eight within a few frenetic overs, effectively ending the contest. Axar said the rapid loss of wickets left no batter with time to settle, describing the collapse as circumstantial rather than structural.

He suggested the psychological impact of the last match, where DC failed to defend 264 runs against Punjab Kings, contributed to hesitation in the batting approach.

Axar pointed to changing pitch conditions, noting the early swing which faded once the ball lost its shine.

"No batter could really settle... we lost wickets in one or two balls," he said, adding that low team totals inevitably affect bowlers' mindset. —*PTI*

LIFTING NATION'S PRESTIGE

Indian weightlifter Aisangfa Gogoi —*PTI*

Indian lifters bag 4 golds in Commonwealth

NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL

Indian lifters impressed everyone at the ongoing Commonwealth Youth and Junior Weightlifting Championships and the corresponding Universal Cup (Senior) in Apia, Samoa, securing four gold medals on the second day of competition.

Sunil Singh lifted a total of 271kg (126kg in snatch and 145kg in clean and jerk) to clinch the gold in the 65kg men's category, while Aisangfa lifted a total of 185kg (79kg in snatch and 106kg in clean and jerk) to bag gold in the 58kg women's category, and Abhinob totalled 284kg (129kg in snatch and 155kg in clean and jerk) to secure top finish in the 71kg men's division.

In the Universal Cup, Arunachal Pradesh's Charu Pesi bagged the gold medal in the men's 65kg category with a total lift of 289kg (127kg in snatch and 162kg in clean and jerk).

Indian Weightlifting Federation (IWF) president Sahdev Yadav congratulated the athletes, coaches and support staff for their performances in the tournament.

"These achievements reflect the hard work and commitment of our athletes and support team. India continues to rise as a strong contender on the global weightlifting stage," Yadav said in his congratulatory message. —*PTI*

WFI bars U-17 wrestler over dual birth certificates

NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL

The Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) has barred an under-17 wrestler from competing on the opening day of the National Championships in Sambhaji Nagar after her father produced two birth certificates from different states, exposing glaring gaps in document verification by the administration.

The wrestler (name withheld), who sought to participate in the women's 57kg category for Madhya Pradesh, was stopped during scrutiny after officials found discrepancies in her birth records.

According to documents accessed by PTI, one birth certificate issued by authorities in Madhya Pradesh lists the date of birth as 26 August 2010, but shows the date of registration and issue as 16 November 2021- more than a decade after the birth.

Another document which records the same date of birth – 26 August 2010 - shows registration dating back to 1 September 2010, in Sriganganagar, Rajasthan, with the place of birth listed as a private nursing home there. However, this certificate itself was issued much later, in April 2025.

The father maintained that there was no manipulation of the date of birth and said a fresh certificate had been obtained from Madhya Pradesh after the family relocated, to enable the wrestler to represent the state. WFI officials, however, refused entry, questioning how a second certificate could be issued by another state without robust cross-verification.

"It raises serious concerns. We are expected to ensure strict compliance on age eligibility, but how are such certificates being issued without proper checks?," a WFI official said.

"If there is duplication across states, it undermines the entire system," official said. —*PTI*

WFI bars a wrestler from competing in National Championships over glaring gaps in docu verification —*PTI*

Sebastian Sawe from Kenya crosses the finish line to win the men's race at the London Marathon in London, Sunday —*PTI*

MARATHON RECORD-BREAKER HAD STRICT TESTING REGIME

LONDON, 28 APRIL

- The 29-year-old made history at the London Marathon on Sunday, clocking 1:59:30 to become the first athlete to break the fabled barrier.

Kenya's Sabastian Sawe has said the rigorous anti-doping tests he voluntarily underwent will help prove his historic sub-two-hour marathon was achieved cleanly.

The 29-year-old made history at the London Marathon on Sunday, clocking 1:59:30 to become the first athlete to break the fabled barrier. The feat comes amid heightened scrutiny of Kenyan athletics following doping cases, including a three-year ban handed to Ruth Chepng'etich last year.

Sawe revealed he agreed with his coaches and management to undergo multiple tests, including extensive out-of-competition checks before his victories in Berlin and London. According to the BBC, Adidas funded a year-long programme through the Athletics Integrity Unit, which included around 25 tests ahead of the Berlin Marathon and a similar number before London.

"Doping has become a cancer in my country," Sawe said, urging fellow athletes to embrace stricter testing to restore trust in the sport.

He also credited his lightweight Adidas racing shoes for aiding his record-breaking run, saying they were "very light, comfortable and supportive". Already a leading marathoner, Sawe said entering the history books "means a lot", adding he marked the achievement simply by resting after the race. —*PTI*

OUT OF CONTENTION

India lose 0-5 to China to end campaign in Uber Cup Finals

HORSENS, 28 APRIL

Two-time Olympic medallist PV Sindhu squandered a strong position as India failed to capitalise on chances, going down 0-5 to China to end their campaign at the Uber Cup finals here. The Indian women's team had opened with a 2-3 loss to hosts Denmark before bouncing back with a 4-1 win over Ukraine.

China, the most successful team in Uber Cup history with 16 titles, was always going to be a formidable opponent, with India having lost to them three times in their last three major ties. While Sindhu remained the leader of the group, Isharani Baruah and Devika Sihag were drafted in place of Unnati Hooda and Tanvi Sharma for the other two singles.

PV Sindhu squandered chances as India go down 0-5 to China to end their campaign at the Uber Cup finals —*PTI*

Sindhu raised hopes as she looked set for a statement win before letting slip an 18-12 lead in the decider to go down 16-21, 21-19, 19-21 to world No. 2 Wang Zhiyi in the opening singles, handing China a 1-0 lead in the must-win Group A tie on Monday It would have taken a miracle to upset the defending champions thereafter and, though the young Indian shuttlers showed fight, they lacked the finishing touch and faltered at crucial moments. "It was a good match. It would have been really good if I would have converted it into a win. I had chances but it wasn't like there were some easy points, every point was hard fought. Every point we were fighting literally very hard," said Sindhu. All eyes will be on the men's team to avenge the loss when it takes on China on Wednesday in the Thomas Cup. —*PTI*

INDIA 'RICHER IN LEARNINGS' DESPITE SERIES LOSS: COACH

BENONI, 28 APRIL

Head coach Amol Muzumdar in a reflective note after India women's national cricket team slumped to a 1-4 defeat against South Africa women, said the visitors would return richer in "learnings" despite the disappointing result.

India won the fourth game but ended the series with a 23-run defeat in the fifth and final T20 here on Monday.

"I think it's been a fantastic series, fought really well. It was competitive right from the start and it's been fantastic to come here in South Africa," Muzumdar said after the conclusion of the series. "Obviously, the result hasn't gone our way. We've been a little disappointed with the 4-1 result, but we have got a lot of learnings out of the series."

The coach pointed to India's inability to strike in the powerplay and lapses in finishing with the bat as key concerns, He however noted visible improvement in the latter half of the rubber. —*PTI*

Asian Games could be moved to pre-Olympic year after 2026

NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL

The Asian Games could be shifted to odd-numbered years after the 2026 edition in Japan, potentially making the continental multi-sport event a key Olympic qualifying platform, according to reports.

The proposal was discussed by the Executive Board of the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) on 21 April in Sanya, China. The aim is to align the Asian Games closely with the Olympic cycle, as the Olympic Games are held in even-numbered years.

Any restructuring of Asian Games cycle is likely with the 2030 edition in Doha, which could be pushed to 2031. —*PTI*

It has been proposed that the 2026 Asian Games in Aichi-Nagoya, Japan, scheduled from 19 September to 4 October, will be held as planned. Any restructuring is likely with the 2030 edition in Doha, which could be pushed to 2031. Riyadh is set to host in 2034, while India has expressed interest in the 2038 Games.

The move reportedly is intended to reduce calendar congestion and increase the relevance of the Asian Games by making it a direct qualifier or final preparation event for the Olympics in more sports.

Currently, only a few disciplines such as hockey and weightlifting use the Asian Games as Olympic qualifiers, despite the event featuring over 40 sports.

Concerns remain in athletics, where players may prioritise global events. —*PTI*

PLAYERS PULL OUT AMID FEAR

Suspected virus outbreak hits Madrid Open

MADRID, 28 APRIL

An illness scare has emerged as an unexpected adversary at the Madrid Open, with several leading players affected by a suspected stomach virus or food poisoning.

Among those hit were Iga Swiatek, Coco Gauff and Marin Cilic. Swiatek withdrew from her match citing illness, while Cilic pulled out after suffering food poisoning. Gauff was seen vomiting during her match on Sunday but later returned to action.

World No. 1 Aryna Sabalenka has so far avoided illness, sticking to a strict diet and limiting time at the Caja Magica complex amid rumours that contaminated food, including shrimp tacos, may be responsible.

Coco Gauff during the Madrid Open tennis tournament in Madrid —*PTI*

Sabalenka fought back from a set and a break down to defeat Naomi Osaka 6-7(1), 6-3, 6-2, extending her winning streak to 15 matches and reaching a 17th consecutive quarter-final. She will next face Hailey Baptiste, who beat Belinda Bencic in a match featuring the longest regular tour tiebreak since 2024.

Second seed Elena Rybakina exited after losing to Anastasia Potapova and criticised the electronic line-calling system, echoing concerns previously raised by Alexander Zverev.

In the men's draw, Stefanos Tsitsipas and Casper Ruud advanced, while teenager Rafael Jódar remains the only Spaniard left after wins and exits for others.

Top Spanish player Carlos Alcaraz withdrew with a wrist injury. A 32-shot rally featuring 15 consecutive lobs also stood out during Ruud's win over Alejandro Davidovich Fokina. —*PTI*